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1847

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

AND THE

CHOSEN FLOCK:

SHEWING

THE PROGRESS OF THE SHEEP OF CHRIST THROUGH THE WILDERNESS OF THIS WORLD TO THE PASTURES OF THE HEAVENLY ZION,

An Exposition of the Twenty-Third Psalm.

BY THOMAS DALE, M.A.

CANON RESIDENTIARY OF ST. PAUL'S, LONDON, AND VICAR OF ST. PANCRAS, MIDDLESEX.

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1847.

DEDICATION.

TO THE CONGREGATION

ATTENDING

The Tuesday Morning Lecture,

AT THE CHURCH OF ST. MARGARET,

LOTHBURY.

MY DEAR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,

HAVING been separated from you, for a longer time than I had expected, "in presence not in heart," I have occupied a portion of the interval in the preparation of this little work. It is designed to embody, in a permanent form, the spirit of those ministrations which it has been my privilege to exercise among you:

and I trust it may be made the instrument, through God's mercy, of recalling them to your memories, and impressing them upon your hearts, so far as they have been in accordance with the written word of God.

I have been influenced, in the selection of the subject, by the two following considerations:—first, that it seems to afford a complete and connected view of the Christian's progress through the wilderness of this world to the "city that hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God;" and, secondly, that the discourses of which this volume comprehends the substance, delivered, as you will remember, during Lent, 1845, were listened to, apparently, with peculiar interest and devotion. It was my heart's desire and prayer, that the impression thus produced

might be as permanent as it was lively; and the wish subsequently expressed by not a few among yourselves, that they might be enabled to meditate in the closet upon the truths which had been set before them in the temple, seemed to indicate a way in which that desire might, by the Divine blessing, be attained. I gladly, therefore, avail myself of the opportunity which has now been presented by the closing of the church for necessary repairs; and I trust that this simple memorial of our connection will abide when "ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more."

May Almighty God, who hath built His Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Head Cor-

ner-stone, grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made a holy temple, acceptable to Him through Jesus Christ our Lord!

I am, my dear Christian Friends and Brethren,

Your affectionate Brother

and Servant in Christ,

THOMAS DALE.

October 13, 1845.

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THE

GOOD SHEPHERD.

CHAPTER I.

The Recovery.

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD—I SHALL NOT WANT.

THIS Psalm has always been regarded as a peculiarly attractive and interesting portion of Holy Writ. It is admired, by the mere lovers of nature, for its exquisite pastoral imagery: it is endeared to the children of grace, by its exact and consummate portraiture of the true Believer: by the precision with which it delineates his dependence, his

confidence, his privileges, and his prospects; by the fidelity with which it tracks his path through life, and by the clearness with which it declares and developes his triumphant passage through the "grave and gate of death."[a] In a word, it exhibits, within the compass of a few short verses, a complete epitome of the believer's experience, from his first recovery by the gracious interposition of the Good Shepherd to his final attainment of an everlasting habitation in the temple of the Lord, which is "the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!"[b]

There is a sense, indeed, in which every professing member of the Church of Christ, nominal as well as real, can appropriate to himself the words with which the Psalm commences, "The

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[a] Collect for Easter Eve.

[b] 2 Cor. v. 1.

Lord is my Shepherd." For David in another Psalm addresses himself to "all lands"—to all the families and nations of the earth, when he says, "Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves: we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture."[c] But the clause which immediately follows, "*I* shall not want;" renders the application personal and distinctive, as well as general. All may say, "The Lord is my Shepherd," but all cannot go on to say, "*I* shall not want:" they who CAN say this are evidently those alone, for whom a special provision has been made, and hence we must discriminate between the general and the personal or special application. All men are alike the sheep of the Lord by creation, by ownership, and by

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[c] Psalm c. 1, 3.

support or provision: but they may also be divided into

1. The Sheep of the Wilderness;
2. The Sheep of the Pasture; and
3. The Sheep of the Fold.

The wilderness is the world: the pasture may denote the Church in profession, and the fold the Church in truth. The wilderness must lack pasture: the pasture itself may be without protection; the fold only is at once adequate and secure. Hence the ultimate prosperity and predominance of the true and spiritual Church is foretold by the Good Shepherd Himself in the emphatic words, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd."[c]

The believer, then, whose experience is outlined in this exquisite Psalm, be-

[c] John x. 16.

longs to the third and last of these classes. He has been brought, not only out of the wilderness into the pasture, but through the pasture into the fold. Provision has been made, both for his sustenance in the one, and for his safety in the other. Having been "baptized into Christ," he has also "put on Christ."[e] And the effect and evidence of having "put on Christ" is the perception of a peculiar and individual relationship to Him: such as we find expressed in the words of the Apostle, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."[f] Now it is clear that we have not this perception by birth, (the birth of nature and of blood,) for "all men are conceived and born in sin,"[g] and the very element of sin is estrangement from God. Nor do we have it (necessarily) by baptism, which is the

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[e] Gal. iii. 27. [f] Gal. ii. 20.

[g] Ministration of Publick Baptism.

birth by water, for then all baptized persons would "lead the rest of their lives according to this beginning," which is manifestly at variance with facts. Nor yet can we acquire it by education, regarded independently of that Divine Influence, which alone can make education the discipline and culture of the soul for immortality. All that human ministry can do, by arguments that convince the understanding, or appeals that rouse the conscience, or persuasions that touch the heart, is to produce general perceptions, to draw forth general acknowledgments, to associate the individual with the mass of mankind around him, not to detach him from it, nor to isolate him in the midst of it. We may compare the true and lively member of Christ to one who not only beholds the light of the sun, and tracks it to the source from which it emanates; but who feels the sunbeam penetrating the rocky

barrier of his own heart, and lighting up the secret chambers of his own soul. Such a perception is to be sought indeed by means, but it is to be attained only by grace. We may have ceased to wander without a guardian or a guide through the wilderness; we may have been led by human shepherds into the pasture of the visible church; but until the grace of God concur and co-operate there will be something yet undone; something which we cannot do for ourselves and which others like ourselves cannot do for us, before we can find entrance into the fold of Christ. "He that believeth," said St. John, "hath the witness in himself"[h] and, "Hereby we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us."[i] We must hear a Voice which others cannot hear: we must feel the guidance of a Hand which

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[h] 1 John v. 10. [i] 1 John iii. 24.

others cannot discern: we must have a perception of God, as dealing separately and singly with ourselves, by the experience of our own lives, by the witness of our own consciences, by the strivings and strugglings of our own hearts, before we can safely regard ourselves as *believers indeed*. We must be conscious of a secret yet a potent influence drawing us away from the vanities of a world that lieth in wickedness, and attracting and attaching us to holy and heavenly things; creating desires and aspirations which earth cannot satisfy; disclosing responsibilities of which the natural man was not aware—constraining us to "live not unto ourselves but unto Him that died for us and rose again."[k] In every case the first manifestation of the Good Shepherd to the sheep is to be found in the consciousness

[k] 2 Cor. v. 15.

of its own far and perilous wandering, and *then* it learns to appreciate and appropriate the language of the Church's true confession—language uttered as a general acknowledgment by the many, but too often understood in the individual application only by the few—"We have erred, and strayed from Thy ways, and there is no health in us:" language suited no less to the solitude of the secret chamber than to the companionship of the House of Prayer: "I have erred and strayed from Thy ways, and there is no health in ME."

This, then, is the first evidence of our title to appropriate the relation implied in the words, "The Lord is my Shepherd," and to expect the privilege attached to it, "I shall not want." We shall have been prepared for discerning "the abundance of grace"[1] in our good

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[1] Rom. v. 20.

Shepherd by first discovering "the abundance of sin," of frailty, and of error, in ourselves, as sheep who have gone astray. Many and various are the ways by which we attain to this perception, for it is the Spirit of God who alone convinceth of sin; and as "the wind bloweth where it listeth," so the Spirit worketh as He will. Some, like Saul of Tarsus, attain it through the medium of an awakened conscience, as when, trembling and astonished, he demanded, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"[m] Such cases as these may be compared to the sheep in the pasture, into which the fierce lion or the stealthy wolf hath found his way: and on the one side it hears the howling of the monster, impatient to devour, and on the other the voice of the good Shepherd, present to the rescue in the very crisis

[m] Acts ix. 6.

of its need. Some, again, attain to it through the medium of an enlightened understanding, as did the Ethiopian eunuch, who, prepared by the study of the prophets to receive their testimony of the Redeemer, no sooner heard Philip the Evangelist expound the words of Esaias, than he "believed with all his heart."[n] Such cases may be likened to the sheep, stopping short in the midst of the wilderness, unterrified indeed by the alarm of *present* danger, but still instinctively conscious of needing guidance and protection, and listening for some sound which shall direct it to a place of safety. Others attain to it through the medium of an impressed, softened, renewed, and conquered heart. Such was Zacchæus: he saw, he heard, he believed, he recognized incarnate Deity; he threw open at once his heart and his

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[n] Acts viii. 27.

house; he gave instant proof of the new-born principle of spiritual life in the utter abandonment of sin.[o] In one and the same moment he felt himself to be a strayed and erring sheep, and looked upon the good Shepherd, who had come to "seek that which was lost," and to "lay it on his shoulders rejoicing." Others, again, may have attained to this perception even in the fold itself. Like Timothy, they may have known even from childhood "the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus;"[p] and the entrance of that word into the heart may give them such light, that they discern their innate and inherent frailty, and, ascribing all the difference between themselves and others to the grace which hath produced it, confess themselves, as to intent or inclination, partakers in the

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[o] Luke xix. 8, 9. [p] 2 Tim. iii. 15.

acknowledgment of the prophet, "ALL we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way."[q] On this head, therefore, it was needless further to enlarge. However the mode or medium of the perception may vary, the fact of the perception itself is of vital importance. We must know, each for himself, the extent of our own wanderings; we must perceive, each for himself, the imminency of our own peril; we must experience, each for himself, the plague of our own hearts—we must express, each for himself, our own conviction; "I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not."[r] We must know ourselves to have been, in every case, as sheep going astray, or we cannot have "returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls:"[s] nay, we must

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[q] Isaiah liii. 6.

[r] Job xxxiii. 27.

[s] 1 Pet. ii. 25.

say, each for himself, "*I* have gone astray, as a sheep that is lost,"[t] before we can say, with a personal appropriation of the power of the words, or even a complete apprehension of their truth, "The Lord is *my* Shepherd; I shall not want."

The first great link, then in the chain of this relationship, being the *perception of our own resemblance to the lost or erring sheep*, the second will be, obviously, the *discerning of the Lord in the character and relationship of our Shepherd.* And here we are privileged to possess a degree of light and knowledge, far exceeding that of the Psalmist himself. No one could be more fully conversant with all that pertained to the pastoral relation than David, yet there would be no small difficulty, even to a faith like his, in applying it to One who was "eternal, immortal, invisible, dwelling

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[t] Psalm cxix. 176.

in the light that no man could approach unto; whom no man *had* seen or could see."[u] He did indeed, as this divine Psalm evinces, derive unspeakable comfort and encouragement from the more broad and general features of the analogy, but he could not carry it onward to perfection, He could not say, as we can, "The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."[w] Whatever the Lord JEHOVAH was to him, that the Lord JESUS is to us, and something more. Yes—we may say, without shadow of irreverence, "*something more*," because, while the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, exercises all the power of the Divine nature, as God in Man, He experiences all the sympathies of the human nature as Man in God. "What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise," and one thing He does which the Father

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[u] 1 Tim. iv. 16. [w] John x. 11.

doeth not—"He lays down His life for the sheep."[x] And this applies in practice, as well as in doctrine. His own words represent the relation as perfected in Himself, which to the Psalmist, was not and could not be, perfected in the Lord Jehovah, "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand."[y] Thus then to dwell, as we do, within the fold of Jesus, is to abide, as the Psalmist did, "under the shadow of the Almighty;"[z] for "all power," said Messiah, "is given unto Me both in heaven and on earth;"[a] and all power, therefore, is wielded for the protection and preservation of His people. We must, accordingly, perceive further, each

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[x] John x. 15.
[y] John x. 28, 29.
[z] Psalm xci. 1.
[a] Matt. xxviii. 18.

for himself, that our own access to God is ever and only through Christ: that, to cite His own words, "I am the Door: by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved;" while "no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."[b] And he who has thus entered, and thus come, may confidently add to the acknowledgment, "The Lord is my Shepherd," the assurance also, "I shall not want;" because in Christ Jesus, as will appear more fully in the sequel, provision is made for every conceivable need. "Christ Jesus of God is made unto us," declared St. Paul, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption:"[c] and were it possible to conceive of aught essential, either for time or for eternity, that was not included within the perfect figure of these four divine properties, we should assuredly find it within the

[b] John x. 9; xiv. 6. [c] 1 Cor. i. 30.

ample circumference of St. Paul's assurance, addressed indeed to the Philippian Church, but equally applicable to every individual believer, "My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus."[d]

This, however, will be more forcibly and profitably illustrated, if we take the more obvious and striking features of the similitude in detail, and apply them as the Psalmist has done, individually, as so many tests pertaining to every true believer—to every one who is a sheep not of the pasture only, but also of the fold of Christ.

Every true believer then can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd;" FIRST because he has been *individually* the subject of recovery from wandering, and of rescue from the destroyer. He has been the one sheep, in error and in

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[d] Phil. iv. 19.

peril, after which the Good Shepherd hath "come into the wilderness, and sought until He found it."[d] Unless he be one of those happy persons who, like Timothy, have been trained and nurtured within the fold from the beginning, he will be able to recall a time when he was, and was content to be, at a distance from Christ: when he had no consciousness of his responsibility, no perception of his danger, no apprehension of his own utter inability to justify himself before God, no experience of the abounding of sin in his own heart, no concern to flee from the wrath to come, no desire to lay hold on the blessed hope of life and immortality. He will be able to recall a time when he went on frowardly in the way of his own heart, not regarding, because not reflecting, whither it would lead him in

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[d] Luke xv. 4.

the end; when he was living without God in the world, unprepared for the summons which might have come to him at any time to "give an account of his stewardship," and unawakened to any just estimate of the fearful penalty—a penalty the more fearful because irrevocable—which awaited not only "the wicked" but also the "slothful servant."[e] For it is not needful to suppose that he was (though he *might* have been) a gross and glaring, a profligate and presumptuous sinner; that he ran to the same excess of riot with those who are "abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate;"[f] that he had "walked in the counsel of the ungodly, or stood in the way of sinners, or sat in the seat of the scornful."[g] But he *must* have been partaker with them in that from which, directly or re-

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[e] Luke xix. 22. [f] Titus i. 16. [g] Psalm i. 1.

motely, all other sins proceed—forgetfulness of God. He must have been living "without God in the world;" he withheld what was due primarily to the Creator, and therefore could not fully render what was due secondarily to the creature, whether to his own soul or to the souls of others. He was therefore living in a state, in which, if he had died, he must have perished utterly. But while he was in this state, the voice of his Saviour came to him with power—"Awake," it said, "thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."[h] Through what medium, or by what instrumentality, the voice came, must rest between God and his own soul. It might be through the ministry of the Gospel. It might be through the word in season, uttered by some Christian monitor or friend. It

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[h] Eph. v. 14.

might be through the recurrence to memory of some early lesson, imprinted on the tablet of the pliant heart by a mother's gentle voice in characters destined to outlast the duration of the mortal body. It might be through the visitation of God's Providence within the sphere of his immediate connection and companionship. It might be through meditation on the word in uneasy days and unrefreshing nights of sickness. It might be through the alarm of conscience, suddenly uplifting her still small voice in the heart, and reasoning of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come."[i] And it might be—it not unfrequently is—so gradually, so gently, so imperceptibly in the appointed course of Christian instruction and waiting upon God, that he can only determine, by the comparison of distant in-

[i] Acts xxiv. 25.

tervals, of the amount and nature of the moral change, and conclude that whereas he was in the wilderness, or at best in the pasture, he is now in the fold. The fact of the change, however, is beyond all doubt: and the existence of the fact is itself the most striking and conclusive testimony to the power which accomplished it. If therefore one who had gone astray has "returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul" (the return being a fact), and if he could not return of his own power, or wisdom, or policy, or goodness (this being a fact also), he is not the less bound to ascribe all the praise of his return where alone it is due, whatever of mystery the process may involve. If facts are mysteries, it cannot excite wonder that mysteries should be facts. The man who had been "blind from his birth," and whom the Lord Jesus, after having anointed his eyes, charged to "go to

the Pool of Siloam and wash,"[k] was utterly unable to determine whether the healing virtue resided in the unguent, or in the fountain, or in neither, or in both; but he was not the less clear as to the fact. "One thing I know," he said, "that whereas I was blind, now I see." And with this fact another was associated with equal distinctness and with equal certainty, that through the power of Jesus alone he had received his sight. Just such a witness is it, that every believer hath within himself: just so, reasoning from the fact of his entrance into the fold to the necessity for the exercise of that power which alone could accomplish it, he too can say, "The Lord is MY Shepherd." The Lord hath rescued me from spiritual death, and quickened me to the life of the soul. "Whereas I was blind, now I see; I was dead and

[k] John ix. 7.

am alive again; I was lost and am found." What else but Almighty Power could have made me what I am; who else but He who hath "begun the good work, could perform it until the day of Jesus Christ?"[1]

The first act, then, which discloses and declares the Good Shepherd, being the *recovery of the lost sheep;* the sheep which must otherwise have perished in the wilderness, or become, even in the pasture itself, the victim of him who "goeth about seeking whom he may devour;" the next is, that He makes the recovered sheep conscious of an individual relationship to Himself; or, to express the same thing in the language of the Gospel, "He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out."[m] Hence we may determine the difference between those who are *called* Christ's, and those

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[1] Phil. i. 6. [m] John x. 3.

who *are* Christ's: between the Church in profession, and the Church in truth: the sheep only of the pasture, and the sheep also of the fold. The former do not hesitate to acknowledge and to claim the relationship in a general sense: they readily admit that Christ is the Shepherd of the vast aggregate, and will even say, with the Psalmist in another place, "We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture." But they do not identify or individualize the dealings of God with themselves. They do not experience any formation of Christ within their own hearts. They are intermingled with the numerous and widely scattered flock, but they are not received into the fold, and they are not "called by name." They may be, outwardly, in communion with Christ's Church, but they are not, inwardly, in communion with Christ Himself. They may know what it is to present themselves within the consecrated precincts

of the House of Prayer; to unite in solemn worship with the multitude that "keep holy-day:" to blend their voices in the response to the lowly prayer, and in the utterance of the apostolic creed, and the melody of the chaunted thanksgiving: but they do *not* know what it is to enter "the secret chamber," and to "close the door," and to exclude the world, and to realize the presence of another and an Invisible Intelligence. They do *not* know what it is to hold communion with the Good Shepherd while the heart intercedes for itself "with groanings which cannot be uttered;" nor do they hear His answer in the ear of faith, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."[n] David knew well,

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[n] Isaiah xli. 10.

by his own experience, how the shepherd individualized his sheep; how, whether they were scattered over rugged mountains, or screened in the declivities of the hollow precipice, or dispersed over the wide champaign, there was not one, which was not, in turn, present to His thought, and which did not in turn become, as circumstances might require it, the object of His special care; whether it were needful to "strengthen the diseased, or to heal the sick, or to bind up the broken, or to bring again that which was driven away, or to seek that which was lost."[o] David knew that the Lord, of whom he thus spake, would fulfil all these offices of love to those who were His people, and the sheep of His fold; while we have in addition the witness of the prophet Isaiah, when speaking of Him who should come forth from Jeho-

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[o] Ezek. xxxiv. 4.

vah with strong hand, whose reward was with Him, and whose work before Him, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs in His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and quietly lead those that are with young."[p] Can we doubt for an instant, therefore, that He, of whom all the Prophets bare such witness, and who appropriates it in the Gospel to Himself; can we doubt that when He "calls His own sheep by name," He enters into a distinct and peculiar relationship with each; and that while, by His attribute of Omnipresence, He diffuses His pastoral care over all, He at the same time concentrates it upon each, realizing to every individual person of His Church the literal, personal fulfilment of His promise to herself, "Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world?"[q]

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[p] Isaiah xl. 11. [q] Matt. xxviii. 20.

We ought, then, to form an adequate notion, in order that we may have a perfect enjoyment, of these invaluable privileges; we ought to associate the retrospect of past deliverances with the expectation of future triumphs. We ought to realize all the benefits to which we become entitled, as the sheep of Christ, through the blood of the everlasting covenant; we ought to be explicit, and even minute, in the expression of our wants and our desires; we ought to spread out the whole heart to our Lord; to look for His guidance; to cast ourselves upon His help, in those minor difficulties and trials, which make up the tenor of ordinary life. The language of St. Paul, on this subject, is most explicit, and surely at the same time most encouraging: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your re-

quests be made known unto God."[r] The Eye of the vigilant and experienced Shepherd is upon all the movements of the flock. He is first to discern the symptoms of incipient disease; He detects the latent tendency to wander before it is developed in the act; He is ready to prevent and anticipate the necessities of His flock; yea, even before the sheep call, "He will answer, and while they are yet speaking, He will hear." "And ye, my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men; and I am your God, saith the Lord."[s] They who hear My voice are "one fold," said Messiah, as I am "One Shepherd." If then, even in common things, we do not ourselves receive, it is oftentimes because we do not ask; we do not sufficiently consider that "we have not a High Priest, who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but who

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[r] Phil. iv. 6. [s] Ezek. xxxiv. 31.

was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, and who, in that He hath Himself suffered, being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted."[t]

Thus, then, from the comprehensive words of David, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want;" we are taught first, that the Lord, our Good Shepherd, individually recovers every *lost* sheep, and then that He individually notes and names every *recovered* sheep. From the verse next succeeding, we shall learn His individual guidance and guardianship of each. It only remains, that having examined in order each clause by itself, we should contemplate the two in their connection, "The Lord is my Shepherd; *therefore* shall I not want." That connection is grounded on the very necessity of the Divine nature, or, we might rather say, the excellency and harmony

[t] Heb. iv. 15; and ii. 18.

of the Divine Perfections. "He hath recovered me from the wilderness," the believer may argue, "therefore I shall not want; Omnipotence to the rescue is Omnipotence also to the defence. He hath known me in His fold, and called me among His own sheep by name; therefore I shall not want: for how can Omnipotence fail to provide where Omniscience cannot fail to foresee? Shall His work be left unfinished? Shall His pleasure remain unfulfilled? Hath He said, and will He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"[u] "My sheep," He said, "shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand;" and if none can pluck me *out* of His hand, how can I lack any thing that I really need while kept *within* it? Surely the supply for human need must be unfailing, because the fountain

[u] Numbers xxiii. 19.

of Divine grace is exhaustless. Whatever demands may be made upon it, the treasury of Omnipotence cannot but continue full; whatever be the necessity of the sheep, it cannot but be counterpoised or rather overweighed by the all-sufficiency of the Shepherd; and until an answer can be found to the questions, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord? If God be for us, who can be against us?"[x] all provision hath been made, alike for time and for eternity, on behalf of every man who can truly say with the Psalmist, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

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[x] Gen. xviii. 14. Rom. viii. 31.

CHAPTER II.

The Guidance.

HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES; HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS.

WE have noted the difference between the SHEEP OF THE WILDERNESS, THE SHEEP OF THE PASTURE, and THE SHEEP OF THE FOLD. We have taken the first of these to represent the heathen; the second, to denote those who are Christians by profession, and members of a visible church; the third, to symbolize the Christian in deed and in truth; the lively member of that "One Family, which both in heaven and earth is named of Christ."[a] We have seen

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[a] Eph. iii. 15.

that the relation between these last and their Good Shepherd is not only general but individual: that every sheep now within the fold of the Church has been individually a wanderer, and individually reclaimed, so that all are concluded alike under the emphatic words of St. Peter, "Ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."[b] We are *now* assured that every one is also the subject of that INDIVIDUAL guardianship and guidance which is another integral and essential part of the office of the Good Shepherd. "He maketh *me* to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth *me* beside the still waters."

The phrase 'green pastures,' employed in the former of these two clauses is rendered in the margin as *pastures of tender grass*. It is well worthy of remark, that

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[b] 1 Peter ii. 25.

precisely the same image is applied to the entire Church in the writings of Ezekiel. By that prophet Jehovah promises, concerning the remnant of His people, "I will feed them upon good pastures, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be. There shall they be in a good place, and in a fat pasture shall they feed on the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God."[c] Here, then, we see that it is the union of the pasture with the fold which is the distinguishing mark and privilege of those whom God hath recovered to Himself amidst the generations of the ungodly. We see that they not only have in the pasture a sufficient sustenance, but in the fold a sure protection. We discriminate, therefore, between what the believer has in common

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[c] Ezek. xxxiv. 14, 15.

with others, and what he has that is peculiar to himself. The pasture evidently is *without* as well as *within* the fold; it belongs to all who are, even by name and in profession the sheep of Christ; but the distinction between the *sheep of the pasture* and the *sheep of the fold* is this—that each of the latter can say concerning the pasture, "He maketh ME to lie down therein." The others appear to feed, but they are not made to "lie down:" they "look into the perfect law of liberty, but they do not continue therein."[d] The pastures, then, are the words of God's mouth, the records of heaven-inspired Scripture, in which we think, and think rightly, "that we have eternal life."[e] But there is clearly a wide distinction to be made between the hearing of the ear, and the heeding of the heart; between assenting with the lips and approving with the mind;

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[d] James i. 25. [e] John v. 39.

between a decent attendance upon out ward means of grace, and so hearing that faith cometh—so reading that knowledge groweth—so reflecting that love worketh thereby. Until "the entrance of God's word giveth light,"[f] so that man discerns himself; reads the perplexing and humiliating volume of his own soul; perceives how he is very far gone from original righteousness, and how there dwells within him an "abundance of sin," which can only be compensated and counterpoised by a greater "abundance of grace;" until he can appreciate the purity of its precepts, and appropriate the excellency of its exceeding great and precious promises, he can have no adequate conception of the controlling or constraining power so beautifully symbolized in the words, "He maketh me to lie down." This expression, divested of its metaphorical form, has the

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[f] Psalm cxix. 130.

exact counterpart of its spiritual significance in the language of St. Paul, "The love of Christ constraineth us."[g] From the clause thus explained and understood, therefore, may be derived a twofold test, which we may describe as the perpetual greenness of the pasture, and the experienced guidance of the Shepherd. First, the pasture is of tender grass, and secondly, it is the Shepherd who maketh His sheep to lie down therein.

By the image of tender grass, which is the natural, the proper, and the salutary sustenance of the sheep, and in the perpetual verdure and exhaustless sufficiency of which it cannot but find perfect satisfaction and full enjoyment, is represented the word of God, Holy Scripture; which is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof (conviction), for correction, for instruction in righteousness."[h] That

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[g] 2 Cor. v. 14. [h] 2 Tim. iii. 16.

the Inspired Volume is not thus profitable to *all* who possess it, must be reckoned not as its own deficiency but theirs. Together with all the doctrines which constitute a true profession it contains the precepts, which, if obeyed, would make men holy, and the promises which, if appropriated, would make them happy: and it is therefore in the adoption of these precepts and the appropriation of these promises that the difference between the children of light and the children of this generation mainly consists. To the "sheep of the wilderness" the word of God is a sealed Book, which they cannot read at all; to the "sheep of the pasture *only*" it is a saddening and a perplexing Book, in which they read bitter things against themselves. But to the "sheep of the fold" it is a pasture in which they seek and find the sustenance of the soul; yea, it is a paradise or garden, in which they seek the herb for healing

together with the fruit for food; or to change the metaphor, it is the armoury, from which they derive all weapons to resist temptation; the treasure house, from which they draw forth all gems and jewels to adorn and to enrich the soul. Among the tests therefore of a man's spiritual state we may reckon the value which he attaches to the word of God, and the use which he makes of it. "I am as glad of Thy word," David declared, "as one that findeth great spoil,"[i] and St. Peter describes believers as "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, even the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."[k] Oh then let us turn to it instinctively, as the sheep to the green pasture, not only when hungering and thirsting after righteousness, but in every time of difficulty, in every time of trouble, in every time of

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[i] Psalm cxix. 162. [k] 1 Peter i. 23.

need, whatever form it may assume; from whatever quarter it may approach. Let us so "order our steps by the word that no iniquity may have dominion over us,"[l] and that we may be enabled to say with David, "As touching the works of men, by the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer."[m] We must look at the word of God not only for the solace of every sorrow, and the balm of every wound, but even for the counteracting influence to that fear of death by which the faithful themselves are not unfrequently disquieted and dismayed in the prospect of the inevitable separation between the body and the soul—and "by reason of which some were all their lifetime subject to bondage."[n] If then we thus think of the word, it can only be because God Him-

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[l] Psalm cxix. 133.

[m] Psalm xvii. 4.

[n] Heb. ii. 15.

self hath enlightened the eyes of the understanding; and if we thus apprehend and thus appreciate the word it is because God hath "taken the stony heart out of our flesh, and hath given us a heart of flesh," and if we thus appropriate and thus apply the word, it is because the Lord, the Good Shepherd maketh us to lie down in the pastures of tender grass: teacheth us to "acquaint ourselves with Him, and be at peace!"

Such then are the green pastures, in which the Good Shepherd will "make" the sheep of His fold "to lie down;" but He will also, and simultaneously, "lead them beside the still waters." As the pastures of tender grass represent the precepts, the revelations, and the exceeding great and precious promises of the word, so the still waters symbolize the influences—the cleansing, purifying, freshening, invigorating influences of the Holy Spirit of God. This exposition is

based first upon Prophecy, the spirit of which is the "testimony of Jesus;" for Isaiah said, or rather the Lord Jehovah said by him, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."[m] Nor can there be the slightest doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself referred to this very promise, "He that believeth in Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water!" "This," the Evangelist adds, "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe in Him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified."[n] And, indeed, the more we follow the comparison into detail, the

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[m] Isaiah xliv. 3. [n] John viii. 38.

more shall we perceive its fitness and its truth. Waters allay the thirst, and they purify the person; and they cleanse the raiment; and they refresh the thirsty soil around. They flow onward in perpetual fulness; and whomsoever they may lave, they are unpolluted; and whoever may drink, they are undiminished still. In all these respects the correspondence is perfect. The consolations of the Holy Spirit; His assurances to the soul of plenary remission for the past, and the promises which He applies of present support, and the prospects which He developes of future and eternal glory, soothe and satisfy the solicitudes and the desires of the awakened soul, while His purifying influences "cleanse from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,"[o] wringing out the sable taint, which is the natural complexion of the heart as well as the visi-

[o] 2 Cor. vii. 1.

ble colouring of the life, and making white the vesture wherewith we are clothed, exchanging the garments of our corruption for "the pure linen, which is the righteousness of the saints." [p] And as in effects, so in properties also, the symbol is complete. The Holy Spirit, like the wellspring in the wilderness, quickens, guides, instructs, comforts, purifies, invigorates whom He will; yet the living waters of His blessed influences continue fresh and full, and *would* do so, were every sinner upon earth to come unto the fountain which hath been opened for sin and for uncleanness: yea, *will* do so, when the promise of the Lord is fulfilled, that there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd; "in the day when there shall be one Lord, and His name one;" when "the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea;"

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[p] Rev. xix. 8.

when "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."[q]

Here, then, we perceive the reason of the order which is observed, in that the "green pastures" are placed before the "still waters." It is the order which would be suggested by the consciousness of man in retracing his steps to the fold of God. When the Good Shepherd has gone after that which is lost, until He find it; when He hath brought it back upon His shoulders rejoicing;"[r] when he hath received it into the fold, and bestowed upon it a name; when, in other words, he who was a sinner has been transformed by grace into a penitent, and he who was a prodigal has been welcomed as a child, it is only natural that

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[q] Zec. xlv. 9; Heb. ii. 14; Phil. ii. 9, 10.

[r] Luke xv. 4, 5.

he should go first to the word, that he may learn the mind of the Spirit; just as the sheep goes through the pastures of tender grass, that it may refresh itself at the still cool waters of the stream. As then, it is the instinctive desire of water which leads the sheep across the meadow, so it is the Spirit that worketh in the believer "to will as well as to do:"[s] yea, who "prevents him, that he may have a good will, and works with him, when he has it."[t] We do not, then, derogate, in the slightest degree from the full perfection, the entirety or integrity of the work of the Spirit, when we represent the enlightened penitent, the rescued and recovered sheep, as resorting to the House of Prayer for the ministration of the Gospel, or seeking the seclusion of his chamber for meditation on the word. "Both these worketh

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[s] Phil. ii. 13. [t] Art. x. of Free Will.

that one and the self-same Spirit," communicating and conveying His grace to the heart by such channels "as He will."[u] We only assume what the experience of many among God's people will corroborate and confirm, when we characterize the work of the Spirit as a work which does not develope itself all at once, but which becomes more and more manifest, in proportion as we advance nearer toward the Paradise of God. We become more and more sensible, in ordinary things, of His intervention, His interposition, enabling us to perform the common duties, strengthening us to endure the common trials of life: causing us to perceive that no action, no habit is too slight or trivial, wherein to confess our Redeemer, and to glorify our God; and also (which is more in accordance with our present consideration), that

[u] 1 Cor. xii. 4, 11.

there is no trial so slight, no temptation so insignificant, by which we may not be ensnared, and by which we may not be overcome, if we are "thinking that we stand" in our own strength, instead of "taking heed" in *His* strength, "lest we fall."[x] With guidance to "green pastures," therefore, the Psalmist has, with good reason, associated guardianship beside "still waters:" for as we can *only* appropriate the word through the Spirit, so we shall ordinarily receive the Spirit through the word; not indeed only by hearing it, not only by reading it; not only by reflecting upon it: the Spirit of God, who is a most free agent, and who is Himself the source of liberty, will come into the heart of the believer when He will; and how He will; and as He will. But the effect of His coming will ever be, the realization of some pro-

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[x] 1 Cor. x. 12.

mise, the recognition of some principle, the attainment of some grace, the understanding of some mystery, which is already in the word, and which we shall thus find, with a deeper impression, and with a fuller developement, brought home with power to the heart.

Here, therefore, we may profitably note the manner in which the influences of the Spirit of God are ordinarily conveyed to the believing heart, as implied in the epithet "still;" "He leadeth me beside still waters." Now this, in the full sense, could apply to David only in the evening of his days, when God had given him rest from all his enemies on every side,[y] and nothing remained for him upon earth but to rule his people in the fear of the Lord, and to discipline his soul for the mysterious and untried state of being which he was soon about to realize. His earlier

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[y] 2 Sam. xxii.

course had been chequered and disquieted in no common degree; and though the waters beside which God had led him were full, and fresh, and pure, and copious, they could hardly be said to have been "still." He looked from a distance, and with intense longing, to the calm, deep, silent "river, that maketh glad the city of our God."[z] But our lot is cast in better times, and under happier circumstances. Persecution and oppression, for the truth's sake, are now no more. The meanest peasant, in a land where liberty is the universal birthright, is far better protected by the shield which is thrown over him by the majesty of the laws, than was David, the victor over tens of thousands, by the martial prowess of all his followers, and by the concentrated splendour of all his victories. We take then the expression,

[z] Psalm xlvi. 4.

"still waters," to denote the manner in which the influences of the Holy Spirit are imparted to the souls of the Lord's people; secretly, silently, imperceptibly, in the conveyance; but palpably, visibly, manifestly to all men, in the consequence. They come down upon the heart "like the rain upon the mown grass, as the showers that water the earth."[a] Or rather they may be compared to the dews that arise, while there is neither the pattering of the rain-drop nor the rustling of the leaves: but he who saw at noon the verdure fading and the flowerets drooping beneath the sultry sunbeam, beholds at morn the one moistened and revived by the sparkling dew-drops, and the other erect in recovered stateliness and beauty. So returning to the imagery of the Psalm, Christ's sheep, in His fold, drink of still waters. None

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[a] Deut. xxxiii 2; Psalm lxxii. 6

may hear the stream flow past: none may behold the flock in the act or attitude of drinking: not a ripple may be wafted to the brink, nor an undulation perceptible on the surface of the stream; but he who hath heard in his heart, and received into his heart, and treasured up in his heart the words of eternal life, goes on his way rejoicing; confessing inly of the house of God, "It is good to be *here;*" [b] or of the secret chamber, wherein God hath talked with him—it may be as a man talketh with his friend, —"It is good to be *there.*" In every instance, the communication of the Spirit, which is here symbolized by drinking the still waters, is to be traced by its effect. The sheep of Christ's flock delights in the pasture; adheres with ever-increasing tenacity to the fold; refuses to venture far from it, even in quest of

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[b] Mark ix. 5.

permitted indulgence; listens for the voice of the Good Shepherd—hears it, follows it, rejoices in it; and the oftener it hears, the more closely it follows, and rejoices in it the more. And thus, as it proceeds along its destined course, ever guided by the Shepherd, and ever sheltered in the fold, "streams gush out in the wilderness, and waters in the desert." Wherever the "Rock" is—which is Christ[c]—there are the still waters, which issue from His riven side, which are the influences of the Spirit of Christ: so that at all times, and in all places, and under all circumstances it can be truly said, by every living member of the Church, as it was said by Paul concerning the Church itself, "Through Him we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access, by one Spirit, to the Father;"[d] and hence, however urgent the necessity,

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[c] 1 Cor. x. 4. [d] Eph. v. 18.

however imminent the peril, succour is often speedy and deliverance is always sure. Whereever the sheep are, there also is the Shepherd ; and green pastures shall spring up to supply their hunger, and still waters gush forth to slake their thirst, until any spot can be found within the circumference of His vast creation which God doth not rule by His Son, and which He doth not pervade by His Spirit, and where any can be found able to pluck out of His hand the sheep which He hath both marked and destined for eternal life.

Only let us bear in mind, that it is not covenanted that all wants shall be *superseded*, although it is promised that all wants shall be *supplied*. It is possible that, even under such guidance, the sheep should stray, though it is *not* possible that under such guardianship the sheep should perish. Long after David had been called out of the wilderness,

conducted through the pasture, and admitted into the fold, "I have gone astray," he acknowledged, "like a sheep that is lost."[e] But then these were very different from his former wanderings, and from the wanderings of those who have never been reclaimed to the fold, in proof of which he adds, "Seek thy servant; for I do not forget Thy commandments." He had probably forgotten them in other days; he had certainly forgotten them during the dreary months of illicit passion and blood-guiltiness; but now they were imprinted on his memory and impressed upon his heart. Now, if through the lingering infirmity of his nature the predominance of sudden temptation had been for a time like one cloud overpassing and obscuring their characters of light, again they shone forth in all their pristine splendour, and again

[e] Psalm cxix. 176.

he recognized in them the only counsels which could guide him safely through the wilderness of this world to the inheritance of the saints in light. Something resembling this will probably be found in the experience of every believer: and hence it will be found also that provision has been made for his restoration when he has fallen, and for his recovery when he hath strayed, while yet his habitual remembrance and recognition of the word will itself ensure that he shall not greatly fall, and that he shall not widely err. All this, and more, is expressly declared in the verse that follows, "He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name's sake!"

Here again we may find two tests by which we should try and examine ourselves, whether we are indeed the sheep of Christ's fold: first, that the word of God is to us as the "green pastures;"

secondly, that the influences of the Spirit of God are to us as "the still waters." First, whether under all circumstances of need and of trial we find a special supply for the special emergency in God's unfailing word—and secondly, whether we can search and analyze our habits and course of action in private, domestic, social, yea, even public and commercial life; and discerning there the action of principles which are altogether foreign from the natural and unrenewed heart of man can say, on this very ground, "Hereby we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us." [f]

We find the Psalmist declaring his own estimate of the excellency of God's word in the most animated and triumphant language, "O how sweet are Thy words to my mouth; yea, sweeter than

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[f] 1 John iii. 24.

honey to my taste. By them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them there is great reward."[g] Surely then this sentiment ought to be adopted, and in the same spirit, by ourselves, to whom are given the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel: who have not only the completed record of the "judgments that are unsearchable and the ways that are past finding out,"[h] but to whom also "the mystery that was hidden from ages and generations" has been fully revealed by "the Apostles and Prophets through the Spirit." This will be, on the part of all *admitted;* but then it must also be *applied.* Whatever may befall us of disaster, disappointment, or difficulty in our passage through life, we must meet it by repairing at once to the oracles of God. We must there ex-

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[g] Psalm cxix. 103; Psalm xix. 11.

[h] Rom. xi. 33; Col. i. 26.

pect, as well as endeavour, to find the word in season, the very thing of which we are in quest, whether it be to inform us of what we know not, or to remind us of what we know; to enlighten our ignorance, to correct our error, to remove our misconception; to dissuade us from what is evil, or attract us to what is good; to support us under the pressure of present trial, or to nerve us for the encounter with apprehended or impending difficulty. The sheep of Christ's fold will look alike for sustenance and for healing to God's pasture—and looking in faith, they will find it ever green, ever fresh, ever adequate, ever inexhaustible. The single golden promise that "all things are at all times working together for good to them that love God"[i] will be found capable of being beaten out, as it were, into innumerable threads,

[i] Rom. viii. 28.

which will suffice to intersect the whole region of this varied existence. And it will be found, that however their glory may be at times obscured by unbelief, and however their fulfilment impeded through infirmity, yet, that "all the promises of God in Christ are Yea and Amen," affirmed by the assent and ratified by the oath, "to the glory of God by us;" and that with every "temptation there is a way of escape, that they may be able to bear it," which is indicated by the word alone.[k]

Lastly, we must inquire also, whether if the pastures are thus "green," wherein our Good Shepherd maketh us to "lie," the waters are also "still," beside which He causeth us to "feed." We must inquire whether the influences and impulses of the Holy Spirit come powerfully,

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[k] 2 Cor. i. 20; 1 Cor. x. 13.

though secretly, silently, and perhaps at the time imperceptibly into our hearts;[1] actuating us even in our familiar domestic and social intercourse, and disposing and inclining us, "whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God."[m] We do not understand by this test that there must be in all things a *direct* reference to religion, but that there must be the absence of all that is manifestly opposed to it. The presence of the Spirit of God is perfectly compatible with every lawful occupation, with every virtuous endearment, with every permitted enjoyment. It will never be distasteful or disquieting, heavy as a burden or grievous as a restraint, except when sin is working in our mortal body, and tempting us to obey it in the lusts thereof. In times of trouble, indeed, such as those which St. Paul and the worthies of the

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[1] Page 54. [m] 1 Cor. x. 31.

primitive Church encountered, the waters were not "still," but they were strong. The influences of the Spirit of God might then be compared to the torrent rushing down the rock, or to the swollen river inundating the plain: now they are in very deed "still waters;" but they are equally needful, as then, to slake the thirst of the soul; and we ought to look for them at our coming in and going out, at our lying down and rising up, so that "whatever we do, we may do all in the name of Jesus and to the glory of God."[m] If we can abide this test in respect of our purposes and intentions, even when our practice falls short through the infirmity of our nature: if we can discern the "willingness of the spirit" even amidst the "weakness of the flesh"[n] we need not be discouraged or disquieted, even though "for a season,

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[m] Col. iii. 17. [n] Matt. xxvi. 41.

if need be, we are in heaviness through manifold temptations," "walking in darkness and seeing no light."[o] We may yet "hope in the Lord, and stay ourselves upon our God," who will yet make us to feed in the green pastures, and cause us to recline in safety beside the still waters. Though "we fall, we shall not utterly perish: for He upholdeth us with His hand;" and faith shall whisper, with welcome voice, in the very moment of extremity, "He restoreth thy soul; He leadeth thee in the paths of righteousness for His own Name's sake."

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[o] 1 Pet. i. 6.

CHAPTER III.

The Restoration.

HE RESTORETH MY SOUL: HE LEADETH ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE.

IN the two verses already considered, we have seen the peculiar privileges and blessings of those who have been brought by Divine grace into the fold of Christ's church, and who can therefore say, "The Lord is my Shepherd: I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters." We have seen that the act of feeding upon "pastures of tender grass," may be taken to symbolize that abiding in Christ's word, concerning which He said, "If ye abide in Me, and

My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."[a] We have seen, also, that the act of lying down beside still waters, typifies that silent yet potent communication of the influences of the Holy Spirit, by which we are purified from all uncleanness of the flesh and spirit, and quickened to "follow after holiness in the fear of God."[b] We have seen that the one is sure guidance, for "by the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer;"[c] the other, safe guardianship, for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty:"[d] liberty from the pollution, the predominance, and of course, from the penalty of sin. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;"[e] and

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[a] John xv. 7. [b] 2 Cor. vii. 1
[c] Psalm xvii. 4. [d] 2 Cor. iii. 17.
[e] Rom. viii. 14.

who shall harm the children if the Father is present to their aid? "If God be for us, who can be against us?"[f]

It must nevertheless be remembered, that where these benefits are most abundantly realized, and these privileges most highly prized, there is still a large deposit of natural corruption in the innermost recesses of the heart. Grace has indeed overcome nature, but nature has not been exterminated by grace. So vehement are still the struggles, and so strenuous the efforts of the "deceitful and desperately wicked heart," that it can only be regarded, even by the holiest of men, as a prisoner held in chains, and ever impatient for the rescue. We have heard the Apostle Paul himself constrained to acknowledge that "there was another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind, and bringing

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[f] Rom. viii. 31.

him into captivity to the law of sin, which is in his members;"[g] and so arduous was the strife, that we may also hear him exclaiming, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" though almost in the same breath, he adds, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"[h] Wherefore then does he thus "thank God," but because he felt that the mercy of God had made on his behalf the very provision which this verse leads us to consider: provision not only for the sure guidance and safe guardianship of His people, but for the correction also of their errors, for the recovery of their losses, for the supply of their deficiencies, for the mastery over their temptations, for their continuance to the end, notwithstanding their haltings, and their stumblings, and their faintings by the

[g] Rom. vii. 23. [h] Rom. vii. 24, 25.

way: "He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake."

The subjects experimentally treated in this verse are, first, the believer's liability to fall, or deviate even *within* the fold of the church, else wherefore should he need to be "restored?" Next, the promptitude of the Good Shepherd to interpose for his rescue: "He restoreth my soul." Then, Christ's subsequent care to "lead him in the paths of righteousness;" and lastly, the reason assigned wherefore He will do this—resolving all into the spontaneousness, the supremacy, the omnipotence of grace—He will do all "for His own Name's sake!"

We have said that the believer is liable to err, even when on the whole he is guided by the Word; and he may also at times be in danger to "give place" even when he is habitually guarded by the Spirit. This is sufficiently evident

from the exhortation of St. Paul, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" and from that of St. Peter, "Be ye sober and watch unto prayer."[i] We need not demonstrate this point at length, because experience here will supply the place of argument. It is the most watchful, the most circumspect, the most consistent, the most devout among the people of the Lord who are inly most conscious of this tendency, and most unfeignedly concerned to resist it. So generally true is this, that St. Paul declares to the entire church at Corinth, "By faith ye stand;"[k] and to every believer he addresses separately an individual caution, "Thou standest by faith: be not high-minded, but fear."[l] Since, accordingly, faith is the only means of standing, and faith is the gift of God, it must be

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[i] 1 Cor. x. 121; Pet. iv. 7.

[k] 1 Cor. i. 24. [l] Rom. xi. 20.

admitted not only that the believer is *liable*, but that he is even *certain* to fall, unless continually "God upholdeth him with His hand." If, then, that hand be for however brief a period withdrawn; if the presumption natural to the human heart spring up imperceptibly as a root of bitterness, and blind the servant of God to a perception of the real source and secret of all his strength; if he trust, however slightly, to his own heart, or lean, however unconsciously, to his own understanding, it can surely be no marvel if some signal inconsistency, such as the dissimulation of Peter, the vacillation of Mark, the petulance of Barnabas, and the impetuosity of Paul, should make it manifest, beyond all power of controversy or dispute, that the man, though renewed, regenerated, having been born anew, not only of water but of the Spirit, is yet, though he be evangelist or apostle, "not sufficient of

himself to think any thing as of himself; his sufficiency is of God alone!"[m]

Such was the view of St. Paul, as expressed in his admonition to others: such was his view also, as recorded in the experience of himself. "Watch ye: stand fast in the faith: quit you like men: be strong."[n] "Run with patience the race set before you, looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith."[o] "Be not weary in well-doing: for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not."[p] And his example spake the same language. "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."[q] Now,

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[m] 2 Cor. iii. 5.
[n] 1 Cor. xvi. 13.
[o] Heb. xii. 1, 2.
[p] Gal. vi. 9.
[q] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

passages like these, it will not be disputed, can apply only to believers; and yet they imply, it is equally manifest, a liability to fall. But, happily for us, there is a compensating principle ever at work to repair the detriment and the damage caused by sin. Happily for us, with the infirmity of the disciple is connected the all-sufficiency of the Lord, so that even departures and deviations, in the experience of the faithful, are overruled to become instruments of calling forth fresh exercises of humility, and thus open a channel for fresh communications of grace. "He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His Name's sake."

What, however, it may be asked by some, is the practical consequence of possessing an assurance that such provision has been made? May it not lead to "continuance in sin, that grace may abound?" To this we answer, as the

Apostle Paul did, with a holy vehemence, "God forbid!"[r] It is no difficult task to trace here the difference between the natural and the spiritual man: the man who knows God as a Father, and the man who knows Him only as a God. The natural or unregenerate man, when detected in the commission of any flagrant act of immorality or disobedience, such as the natural conscience itself cannot but condemn, acts the part of the froward child which, conscious of having transgressed, would seek to hide itself from the parent; skulking into secret places in order to screen the fault and in hope to evade the penalty. So did Adam, the first transgressor, when guilt made him, for the first time, conscious of its inseparable companion, fear; and he sought covert and concealment among the trees of the garden.[s] So

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[r] Rom. vi. 1. [s] Gen. iii. 8—10.

did the false prophet, whom Micaiah reproved in the presence of Kings Ahab and Jehosaphat. "Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself."[t] So will all those who have confederated against the Lord and against His anointed do in that day when the Judge shall be made manifest in all His terrors, and they shall vainly invoke "rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the wrath of God and of the Lamb."[u] So do not, so never will do, "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."[w] They, even as others, may be "overtaken in a fault;"[x] they may be overmastered by a temptation, they may be entangled in a snare, for where is the just man upon earth who doeth good and sinneth not. But if it be so, no

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[t] 1 Kings xxii. 5.
[u] Rev. vi. 16.
[w] Gal. iii. 26.
[x] Gal. vi. 1.

sooner are they awakened to a sense of their error; no sooner do serious and sober reflection and self-examination declare to them wherein they have demeaned themselves unbecomingly in their conduct, or spoken unadvisedly with their lips, or permitted the intrusion of iniquity into the heart, than they fly *to* their Good Shepherd, not *from* Him; they candidly acknowledge their fault, instead of endeavouring to dissemble or disguise it: instead of fabricating excuses and palliatives, which conscience knows, however plausible they may seem, to be either frivolous or fictitious, they cast themselves without extenuation or reserve upon the free and full forgiveness of the Lord, and the language of their acknowledgment is just what He Himself hath taught them, "Pardon mine iniquity, O Lord, for it is great."[r]

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[r] Psalm cxxx. 4.

Nor, in such cases, do they arraign, however they may deprecate, the rod with which He visits their offence, and the scourge with which he chastises their sin. Rather do they adopt for their own the supplication of the Prophet, "Correct me, O Lord, but with judgment; not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing."[z] And, thus entreated, however He may in mercy afflict the body, He will assuredly restore the soul. Grace is signally and triumphantly displayed, not only in those of God's people who have been prevented from falling, but in those also who have been permitted to fall. And the prompt discernment, the frank confession, the entire abandonment, the unfeigned abhorrence of the sin may indicate the true child of God, the rescued sheep of Christ's fold, the adopted

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[z] Jer. x. 24.

child of Christ's family, with scarcely less precision than the successful resistance to temptation; the preservation of integrity amidst circumstances of peculiar trial; the cultivation of a spirit of meekness, even among those who are enemies to peace; and the sacrifice of interest or of inclination for the spiritual good of those around us. Yes, when the true believer has been overtaken in a fault or betrayed into a snare, scarcely, perhaps, has the enemy begun to enjoy his triumph; scarcely have the adversaries of God and of God's people taken up the taunting word, and found occasion to blaspheme, when a genuine practical contrition, manifesting itself by indubitable signs, and obliterating every trace or vestige of the unadvised word or hasty act, is heard to answer from within, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise:"[a] He

[a] Micah vii. 9

restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His Name's sake!"

It must be noted, however, that the restoration, though from the first certain, and at the last complete, is not always or generally accomplished all at once. In ordinary cases, the return to duty precedes the renewal of the light of God's countenance, and the chastening is thus made to generate a salutary apprehension of the sin. The reason of this is plain; and it is a reason worthy in all respects of Him who acts upon it. All sin, whether of the believer or the unbeliever, may be said to have its origin in forgetfulness of God; and this, which in the latter is habitual, in the former is but occasional. In the latter it is abiding; in the former it is but transitory. Of the unbeliever it may be said, that "God is not in all his

thoughts:"[b] of the believer, that some of his thoughts may occasionally wander from his God. His principle of action, indeed, the secret of his practical consistency, is, that he "sets God always before him."[c] He realizes for himself the promise of his Divine Master, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world;" but then he is liable to fluctuate in the application of this principle, and prone to languish in the liveliness of this perception. He lives in an ensnaring world. His occupation may compel him to mingle much with persons whom the absence of sympathy in the most important concerns would otherwise lead him to avoid. He may be encircled with worldly connections and beset by worldly companionships and associations; he may be exposed to unwilling contact with that which hath a

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[b] Psalm x. 4. [c] Psalm xvi. 8.

tendency to defile; and the influence of such persons, and of such associations, and of such pursuits, may operate upon him silently, and at first inperceptibly, but not on that account the less injuriously, until, in evil hour, and perverted for a time by those who habitually forget God, he ceases to remember Him as he ought. Here, then, is an offence which, at the hand of a judicious and tender Parent, deserves and demands chastisement. But when the chastening is inflicted and tempered by a Father's hand, it is remedial, not resentful; it is designed, not to consume the sinner, but to mortify and to eradicate the sin. How, then, under circumstances such as these, does our Good Shepherd proceed? Does He leave those who are His recovered, rescued, chosen, named, and noted sheep, to wallow unchecked in the mire of iniquity, and to be hardened, unresisting, through the deceit-

fulness of sin? Does He leave them prostrate and powerless to the enemy who has treacherously prevailed over their weakness, and malignantly exults in their temporary and apparent overthrow? Assuredly not; He makes them to become conscious of their wandering and sensible of their infirmity; He awakens in them the spirit of penitence, embodying itself in the utterance of prayer; He brings them up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and sets their feet upon a rock;"[d] but he does not always, or at least speedily put "the new song into their mouths;" He does not at once vouchsafe the same measure of light which the penitent enjoyed before his fall; He does not at once scatter, with the sunbeam of His countenance, the clouds that have collected during the interval of separation from Himself.

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[d] Psalm xl. 1, 2.

For example, God put away David's sin, but he did not put away David's punishment. His soul was saved from death; but his heart was rent in twain when he looked upon those sufferings of the guiltless babe which his own iniquity had caused.[e] In like manner, his Master's look of pardoning mercy from the cross spoke to Peter's heart forgiveness of his base denial: but was not the soul of Peter still humbled, and his spirit still grieved within him, when he responded to the thrice iterated inquiry, "Lovest thou me?" "Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee."[f] Just so in our own case, that which was the producing cause of the offence ordinarily becomes to a certain degree its punishment; and the repentant transgressor, who erred through departing from the light, is not

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[e] 2 Sam. xii. 16. [f] John xxi. 17.

unfrequently left, as a fit recompense of his error, to sit for a season in darkness. But it is not thick darkness; it is not total darkness; darkness untempered and uncheered by a single ray of hope. Like the twilight that ushers in the dawn, it affords prospect and promise of returning light: like the shadow that passes during the eclipse of the orb of day, it carries with it the expectation and the earnest of an emerging sun. Though the believer "walk in darkness," the Lord, as he hath declared by His Prophet, "will be a light to him."[g] When, therefore, we are unhappily conscious of having been thus beguiled into error through forgetfulness of God, and lament that His cheering, gladdening presence is judicially withdrawn; when we are in heaviness through manifold temptations, inquiring with the Psalmist,

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[g] Micah vii. 8.

"Lord, how long?" or exclaiming with the Patriarch, "Oh, that I were as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon me,"[h] let us say meekly, as the Church did of old, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him;"[i] and let us expect and confide that we shall realize in His own good time, the sure prospect of deliverance unfolded to all who patiently wait for Him. "He will plead my cause," each of us may say with the Prophet, and "execute judgment for me. He will bring me into the light, and I shall behold His righteousness."[i] Then, then shall the restored believer, in the fulness of an overflowing heart, take up the strain of the Church, no longer oppressed, but overcoming; no longer prostrate, but exalted; "Who is a God like unto Thee, that passeth by the trans-

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[h] Job xxix. 2, 3. [i] Micah vii. 9.

gression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy."[1]

There is, indeed, another sense in which we may consider the expression, "He restoreth my soul." It may refer to affliction, which is chastening under another form, and for other purposes; designed, for example, to prevent rather than to punish sin in ourselves, or to overrule our Christian patience and fortitude to the profiting of others. Of affliction, however, in its most severe and repellent form, as symbolized by the "valley of the shadow of death," the following verse will lead us to speak; and we may now proceed to that which is here described as following upon and after restoration; the care of the Good Shepherd to lead the restored and rescued sheep thenceforth in "paths of

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[1] Micah vii. 18.

righteousness." This, indeed, He often accomplishes by means of these very failures and deviations, errors and frailties, the remembrance of which calls up so deep a blush of shame upon the cheek, or awakens such a sense of unworthiness, self-reproach, or self-abasement in the heart, that they "hate even the garment spotted by the flesh."[m] We have an instance and illustration of this in the fervour with which David prays, and that towards the close of his eventful career, when fleshly lusts had now, we may hope and believe, wellnigh ceased to war against his soul, "Remove from me the way of lying. Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity. Order my steps in Thy way, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me."[n] And is not the principle of God's dealing still and ever the same? May it not

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[m] Jude xxiii. [n] Psalm cxix. 29, 30, 133.

still be asked, "Who teacheth like Him; like Him who overrules even error to the production of humility, and thus "overcomes evil with good?"[o] Beyond all question, the Apostle James had respect to this very important part of Christian experience, when he enjoined believers "to confess their faults one to another," as well as to "pray one for another, that they might be healed."[p] Surely this intimates, that believers may be profited and edified by the communication of each other's experience; just as St. Paul glances at the same result, when he exhorts, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."[q] True it is, that though the instrument

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[o] Rom. xii. 21. [p] James v. 16.

[q] Gal. vi. 1, 2.

of communicating knowledge be the experience of another, the Teacher is and ever must be the Holy Spirit of God: and whatever it be, that either enables us to discern, or inclines us to pursue the path of righteousness, He alone it is who leadeth us therein. But if the happiest of mankind are they who learn under His teaching, from the experience of others, those are not unhappy who learn also from their own; who are thus taught to "trust in the Lord with all their heart, and lean not to their own understanding: in all their ways to acknowledge Him, that He may direct their paths."[r] And the acknowledgment on their part will lead to the direction on His, even as the cause to the effect. The consciousness that they have erred through departing from His guidance, and that they can walk aright only while

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[r] Prov. iii. 5, 6.

they follow it, will lead them to seek that guidance yet more earnestly in time to come; and though, after all, they can possess in themselves no claim nor title to the continuance of the privileges of which they have proved themselves unworthy;—even the guidance of such a Shepherd, and the guardianship of such a God—yet grace will accord to them the plea which nature must have withheld, and they may still confide that He will lead them in the paths of righteousness; not for their penitence or prayer, their genuine compunctions, or their better purposes, but simply, and entirely, and gratuitously "for His Name's sake."

Yes, there is nothing in the very best and wisest, and holiest of our race; in John, who so tenderly loved; or Stephen, who so intrepidly suffered; or in Paul, who laboured more abundantly than all—to move the lovingkindness and favour of God towards them as of title and desert.

"My goodness," said the Psalmist, "extendeth not to Thee:"[s] "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect,"[t] said the Apostle Paul, even at an advanced period of his bright career; and to condense every similar example into one broad universal precept, "When ye have done all that is commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which it was our duty to do."[u] It is, accordingly, a most consolatory, a most cheering, a most delightful thought, that however *we* may change or fluctuate—faith now rising into glad assurance, now sinking into discouragement, disquietude, or almost dismay—grace is ever the same. What the Shepherd will do for "His own Name's sake" can never be left undone; for "Jesus Christ

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[s] Psalm xvi. 2.

[t] Phil. iii. 12.

[u] Luke xvi. 10.

is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;" and "all the promises of God in Him are Yea, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God by us."[w] Even to the Church of old, under the preparatory dispensation of symbols, and shadows, and sacrifices, the language which Jehovah designed to hold was identical with this—"I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgression, for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."[x] And have we not the same assurances repeated and ratified; yea, enlarged also and strengthened in the Gospel? Unquestionably, it is for Christ's sake, not the believer's, that "all manner of sin and unrighteousness shall be forgiven unto men."[y] It is for Christ's sake, not the believer's, that God will bestow every good and perfect gift. It is out

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[w] Heb. xiii. 8; 1 Cor. i. 20.

[x] Isaiah xliii. 25. [y] Matt. xii. 3.

of the riches of His grace in Christ Jesus that He will supply *all* His people's need. It is "His grace which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord!"[z] Well may the Apostle Paul say, therefore, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,"[a] for Jesus ever liveth to make intercession, and in Him the Father is "ever well pleased." If Jesus, then, "is the Author and Finisher of our faith,"[b] the end cannot but be in accordance with the beginning; and what the beginning hath been, St. Paul has declared to the Ephesian Church: "God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sin, hath quickened us together with

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[z] Rom. v. 21.
[a] Heb. iv. 16.
[b] Heb. xiii. 3.

Christ;"[c] and again, "By grace are ye saved; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."[d] Whatever, then, is for His Son's sake, is for His Name's sake, for His Name is magnified in His Son; and thus the rescued flock of Christ's fold, the Church, have a twofold security for present guidance by His counsel, and future admission to His glory. "My sheep shall never perish, nor shall any be able to pluck them out of My hand:" and then He adds, as if to make assurance on a point of such unutterable moment doubly sure, "My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand!"[e]

At length, then, we have traced the course of the believer to the point so expressively described by St. Paul, as

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[c] Eph. ii. 4, 5. [d] Eph. ii. 8.

[e] John x. 29.

"standing in grace, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God."[f] Grace, indeed, is the assurance of glory, as glory is the consummation of grace; and who can deny that this connection was clearly perceived by him who said, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsels, and afterwards receive me to glory?"[g] The very fact, that "the Lord" will do all for His own Name's sake, of itself constitutes the assurance that nothing will be left undone: and it is upon the very same consideration that St. Paul bases the confidence entertained by him on behalf of the Philippian Christians, that "He, who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."[h] As, in old time, Jehovah "wrought for His Name's sake, that it should not be polluted among the Gen-

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[f] Rom. v. 2. [g] Psalm lxxiii. 24.

[h] Phil. i. 6.

tiles," so it is equally true, at this hour, "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it."[i] And thus, by two immutable things, the word, wherein it is impossible for God to lie—and the truth, wherein it is impossible for God to fail—"we may have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel."[k] For His Name's sake—the Name that is holy, that is reverend, that is pure; that precludes of itself all variableness, or shadow of turning; all infirmity of purpose or imperfection of act; all possibility either of error in the selection of instruments, or failure of means to accomplish the end. "Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"[l] If it were for OUR sakes, indeed, we might well be depressed and

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[i] 2 Thess. v. 24.
[k] Heb. vi. 18.
[l] Numb. xxiii. 19.

disquieted by the consciousness of utter demerit: we might well be agitated by incessant fear of losing the things that we had wrought, and forfeiting the full reward. But not so, when He hath done it: and done it too for His own glory, for His own praise, for His own Name, and for the sake of Him, who is the ever and only beloved of the Father; to whom He hath "given out of the world" a chosen flock, an adopted family "a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into marvellous light;"[m] in life, by their holiness; and in death, by their salvation!

And now we must pass on to consider the believer's solace in affliction, even in that intensity of sorrow which is symbolized by passing through the dark

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[m] Peter ii. 9.

"valley of the shadow of death;" and examine how it is possible, when faith is in full operation, even *there* to fear no evil; having at once "a rod" for guidance, and "a staff" for support. This part of the subject is peculiarly interesting to those who know that they are "born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward;" and who are taught by the Gospel itself to ask, "What son is he, whom the Father chasteneth not?"[n] Here, except in few and rare cases, the sheep will follow the shepherd; and if the Great Captain of our salvation was Himself made perfect through sufferings, can we wonder if the servant should in this be "as his master, and the disciple as his Lord?" But then it is ensured to us that "if our afflictions abound, so our consolation also shall abound through Christ:" that "if we suffer with Him,

[n] Job v. 7; Heb. xii. 7.

we shall also reign with Him;"[o] and that, meantime, no suffering shall be prolonged beyond its allotted season, nor permitted without its peculiar need. "There shall no temptation take us, but such as is common to man;" and even if it come upon us suddenly, and before we have discovered the way of escape, we "have a High Priest, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin; and who, in that He hath suffered, being tempted, is able also to succour them that are tempted."[p] He will not forsake the work of His own hand: He will not relinquish the cost of His own blood: He will not desert in the wilderness, or abandon to the beast of prey, the sheep whom He hath brought home to His fold; having

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[o] 2 Cor. i. 5; 2 Tim. ii. 12.

[p] Heb. ii. 18; iv. 15.

led them to the green pastures, and made them to lie down beside the still waters, He will also, if need be, "restore their souls—He will lead them in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Consolation.

YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR THOU ART WITH ME: THY ROD AND THY STAFF THEY COMFORT ME.

WE have now traced the believer's course from his recovery to the fold, when "the Lord" becomes in the peculiar sense, his "Shepherd," through the various stages of instruction through the word, sanctification by the Spirit, and restoration after backsliding, to that habitual "patient continuance in well-doing" which is implied in the words, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake." We have dwelt with thankfulness and with de-

light on these last memorable words, as affording the strongest conceivable consolation to those "who have fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel," because resolving all that is to be done *in* them, as well as all that has been done *for* them, into the sufficiency, the sovereignty, the supremacy of grace, The reliance of the Psalmist, despite his own conscious and continual frailty is, as we have seen, on the immutability of Jehovah, "whose mercy endureth for ever;" while *we* can add to this the gracious assurance conveyed through the Prophet Malachi, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,"[a] and the emphatic declaration of St. James, that "with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."[b] It is our high privilege, then, to build for eternity on a "foundation that never can be

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[a] Malachi iii. 6. [b] James i. 17.

moved;"[c] and though we have not and cannot have, any covenanted and chartered immunity from the "troubles to which man is born, as the sparks fly upward," yet of this we are assured, that come what may, our foundation standeth sure, having this seal, "the Lord knoweth them that are His."[d] And when the Apostle declares his persuasion that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,"[e] he does but repeat with greater minuteness of detail, the confidence here expressed by the Psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,

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[c] 1 Cor. iii. 11.
[d] 2 Tim. ii. 19.
[e] Rom. viii. 38, 39.

for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

It has already been observed that by this strong expression, "the valley of the shadow of death," is symbolized affliction, when it has assumed its sternest aspect, and multiplied its terrors to the utmost. And these words, accordingly, involve four things.

I. The TRIAL; "passing through the valley of the shadow of death."

II. The CONFIDENCE; "I will fear no evil."

III. The GROUND of this confidence; "Thou art with me."

IV. The NATURE and the INSTRUMENTS of SUPPORT; "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

First then, the TRIAL; the trial, which may come even upon those who are most faithful to their Good Shepherd and best beloved by Him, at any time, from any quarter, or under any circumstances.

We are certified, in the Old Testament, that "though affliction cometh not forth out of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground, yet man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward."[f] While the Gospel embodies precisely the same truth, though in the most mitigated and least repulsive form, where it declares, that "if we be without chastisement, whereof all the children of God are partakers, then are we bastards, and not sons;" and when it demands, "what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?"[g] And this will include trial under every diversity of form, for all are comprehended under the emphatic imagery of the Psalmist, as will at once appear from other passages, in which the very same emblem, the "shadow of death," occurs. Job indeed applies it even to the grave, which he designates "the

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[f] Job v. 6, 7. [g] Heb. xiii. 7, 8.

land of darkness, the shadow of death;" but he takes it also to denote extreme heaviness of spirit: "My face is foul with weeping, and on mine eyelids is the shadow of death;" and again, to express that which is secret and concealed from human eye: "He searcheth out all perfection; the stones of darkness and the shadow of death."[h] In the 44th Psalm the same phrase is taken to denote national degradation and discomfiture. "Thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death:"[i] while the Prophet Jeremiah speaks of the light for which self-deceivers look, being turned into the "shadow of death."[k] The Prophet Amos, again, reverses the metaphor, and describes the Lord as interposing on behalf of His people, "to turn the shadow of death into the morning."[l] All these expressions then, with others

[h] Job x. 21, 22; xxviii. 4. [i] Psalm xliv. 19.
[k] Jeremiah xiii. 16. [l] Amos v. 8.

which might be adduced, concur to vindicate our application of the figure, and to generalize the promise, so that it shall include the "bitterness which the heart only knoweth,"[m] and which is unspoken, unsuspected, unrevealed, as well as that utter misery which, in the case of the apostles, was "a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men"[n] such as was heard in the bitter lamentation of the Patriarch, when weighed down with the pressure of many years and the accumulation of many sorrows: "All these things are against me;"[o] or in the melancholy greeting of her who returned a childless widow to the land of her nativity, whence she had gone forth with a fond husband and two manly sons: "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara; for the Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me;"[p] or in the

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[m] Prov. xiv. 10.
[n] 2 Cor. iv. 9.
[o] Gen. xlii. 36.
[p] Ruth i. 20.

emphatic witness of St. Paul, that he was "in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft;" yea, that he was "pressed beyond measure, above strength, so that he despaired even of life."[4]

From this, then, it must be manifest that whatever form the trial may assume or in whatever direction it may lead, the "steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord."[5] Nothing happeneth to him without a purpose, nor need anything happen to him without a benefit; for "though no chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but rather grievous," said St. Paul, yet "afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." This must, however, apply to the chastening designed for man by God, not to that which is fabricated by man for himself;

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[4] 2 Cor. 6; xi. 23. [5] Psalm xxxvii. 23.

to that which comes in the order of Divine Providence, not to that which originates in man's own wilful delinquency or deviation from the path of duty. Even for such, indeed, a provision has been most mercifully made, so that the very first endeavour, on the part of the wanderer, to return, brings with it the assurance of a welcome to the Shepherd's fold and heart. We ought not, however, to be startled or surprised if severe visitations come to us in the way of afflictive Providence and encounter us even in the path of duty: our blessed Master Himself was "led of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil."[s] Paul was summoned by a Divine visitation into Macedonia, where he was ignominiously scourged and shamefully entreated at Philippi; and he went bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, though he

[s] Matt. iv. 1.

knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him there.[t] St. Peter declares to the whole Church, "that though for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations, it is only that the trial of your faith, being more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ."[u] Whatever then may be the aspect of the trouble;—whether it be estranged affections, or altered circumstances, or reputation unjustly assailed, or confidence betrayed by falsehood, or kindness repaid by ingratitude;—whether it be the misconduct of those whom we most trusted, or the bereavement of those whom we held most dear;—whether it be the presentiment in the mind of some impending evil, or the

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[t] Acts xvi. 9, and xxi. 12, 13.

[u] 1 Peter i. 7.

developement in the body of some mortal disease;—it is alike comprehended within the import of the Psalmist's words, and should alike draw forth his expression of undoubting confidence, "I will fear no evil:" And for this reason, that fear argues of itself weakness of faith; and the indulgence of fear is virtually, therefore, encouragement to unbelief. Could we, indeed, imagine any thing to be lacking either to the perfect Omniscence of our Good Shepherd, or to His Almighty Power; any evil capable of befalling His flock which He did not foresee, or which He did not permit, or which He did not possess the power of overcoming with good; could we imagine any limitation to the sovereignty claimed by Christ, when He said, "All power is given unto Me both in heaven and on earth"—could we find any one able "to pluck His sheep out of His hand," or to harm them while shielded by it, and sheltered within

it; could we conceive His hand to be "shortened," that in time of our extremity, He "could not save," or His "ear to be so heavy," that under the pressure of distress or difficulty, "He could not hear,"[w]—then fear of evil might reasonably find a lodgment even in the heart of faith. A shepherd might justly be regarded as unable to secure the complete deliverance and safety of his flock, who was constrained, through lack of power or of knowledge, to leave any thing undone; whom any subtlety could circumvent, or any ingenuity evade, or any force overcome. But unbelief has not this apology. In overcoming death, the king of terrors, our Saviour Christ hath also overcome every inferior adversary, and the "valley of the shadow of death" is pervaded in every part by the presence of Him, who will sustain His sheep under every trial, succour them in every con-

[w] Isaiah lix. 1.

flict, and cause them at the least "to become more than conquerors through Himself, who hath loved them." And therefore it is, that the Apostle Paul exhorts believers "in every thing to give thanks, for this, he says, is the will of God concerning them," and congratulates them that "all things are yours; whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's."[x]

Let it be our object, then, in meditating upon this verse, not to evade or overlook the conclusion which is inevitable—the conclusion, I mean, that we must ourselves pass through the valley of the shadow of death; probably under various aspects, and assuredly under that which is the last, and to nature the worst; for it is appointed unto man

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[x] 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

once to die."[y] But let it be our object to realize, both in affliction and in death, the confidence of the Psalmist, "I will not fear," and to ground it on the sure basis of the Lord's own declared and experienced presence, "for Thou art with me." The constant presence of our Good Shepherd, indeed, with every one of the sheep of His fold, is obviously a fact; and a fact, on scriptural principles, impossible to be denied. For if Messiah could say, even while He sojourned upon earth, that "wherever two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them,"[z] then what can be conceived capable of preventing or of obstructing the fulfilment of His promise to every individual believer, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world?"[a] The

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[y] Heb. ix. 27.
[z] Matt. xviii. 20.
[a] Mat. xxviii. 20.

Omnipresence of Messiah is an integral part of His ability to save "even to the uttermost;" and to deny it were to divest Him of a portion of His inherent and unalienable Deity. There is, however, another reason why it is impossible for faith to doubt this—that in every true believer, according to St. Paul, "is formed Christ the Hope of Glory:"[b] and how can His presence be lacking to any, when His abiding place is in the heart? All the images and illustrations under which Christ is pleased to develope and declare the nature of His union to His people, preclude the possibility even of the contrary supposition. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me,"[c] So long as the branch bears fruit, therefore, it abides in the

[b] Col. i. 27. [c] John xv. 4, 5, 6.

vine; and so long as it abides in the vine Christ is necessarily present; for its vigour, its vitality, its fruitfulness, are all the effects and the evidences of His presence; while who does not know, that the believer's best support, under the pressure of every trial, is the assurance of the presence of his Lord? And we have an illustrious example of this in the first martyr, Stephen. No situation could well be conceived more appalling, more overwhelming, than his. Encompassed on every side by an infuriated multitude, clamouring for his blood; recognizing among them, it may be, his own kinsmen, friends, or companions in the flesh —assuredly, his own former guides and teachers, the elders of his people, and priests of the Most High God—the victim of a lawless multitude, and in the agonies of a death as painful and lingering as it was also ignominious, he was sustained in this most fearful pas-

sage through the valley of the shadow of death by the consciousness of his Master's presence. While the power of vision remained to him, he turned his eyes to the hills whence came his help, and this was his dying witness—"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God."[d] These, indeed, were days of peculiar trial, and therefore of peculiar consolation; but the God of Stephen is still the Refuge of His people, nor can we doubt, that the exercise of a similar faith would be attended by a similar result. Be the trial what it may, no temptation will be permitted to take us but such as is common to man; and "God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will, with the temptation, make a way to escape, that we may be able to

[d] Acts vii. 56.

bear it." Having, then, these "exceeding great and precious promises,"—far exceeding in fulness and in explicitness what the Psalmist possessed, we ought, assuredly, to emulate his faith; and if, by "fainting in the hour of adversity," we prove that our "strength is small,"[e] at least, we both know the cause, and we know the remedy. The cause is unbelief: the remedy is prayer: prayer arising from the heart, and iterated with a holy importunity that will find entrance to the ear of our Good Shepherd, "Lord, help our unbelief: Lord, increase my faith!"[f]

Be it noted, however, that when we seem to speak of the Good Shepherd as comparatively near, or comparatively far off, we speak in reference not to His actual presence, but to the discernment of His people. The star which is fixed in the firmament is ever at the same distance

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[e] Prov. xxiv. 10. [f] Matt. ix. 24.

from the observer; but the instrument which science has constructed to aid the researches of the astronomer causes it to *appear*, though not to *become* more near. Faith, however, goes beyond this, and imparts the spiritual perception of that which not only *seems* to be, but *is*. "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end." Thus it was that St. Paul stayed himself in the utmost extremity of human endurance; and thus he exhorted the Hebrew Christians to "take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and to endure patiently the injuries offered to their persons, looking off, looking away to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith."[g] And he quickens them in the attempt to do this by the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who, for the "joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising

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[g] Heb. x. 34, and xii. 2.

the shame, and is now sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."[h] Here, as in all beside, our Divine Master has "left us an example, that we should follow his steps;"[i] and for this purpose, He hath connected the endurance of the cross with the expectation of the crown. "Be not weary in well doing, for in due season ye shall reap if ye faint not. Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; for, after ye have patiently endured, ye shall obtain the promise."[k] "Behold," said the Apostle James, "we count them happy which endure."[l] And if it be asked, Wherefore? the answer is returned at once, in the words of Holy Writ, "Because the light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out

[h] Heb. xii. 2. [i] 1 Pet. ii. 21.
[k] Gal. vi. 9; Heb. vi. 15.
[l] James v. 11.

for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but those which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal!"[m]

It only remains that we consider the means by which this support shall be conveyed and administered to the believing soul, as symbolized in the words, "Thy rod, and Thy staff, they comfort me."

The "rod" and the "staff" are mentioned together in the very same connection, though with a very different application, by the Prophet Isaiah, "Thou hast broken the staff of his shoulder, and the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian:"[n] and again, in the 10th chapter, "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand, is my

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[m] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. [n] Isaiah ix. 4.

indignation;"[o] and yet once more, in a passage where "rod" is synonymous with sceptre, "The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers."[p] The "rod" or "sceptre," consequently, is the ensign of office or authority; the "staff" is the instrument of protection or defence. If therefore we interpret both in accordance with the pervading image of the Psalm, we shall take the staff to be the shepherd's instrument of defence while the sheep are in the pasture, and the rod to be the instrument of office, with which He points them to the fold, and reckons or enumerates them as they enter. In other words, the rod may be what our Church has termed "the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) He hath constantly decreed by His counsel, secret to us, to

[o] Isaiah x. 5. [p] Isaiah xiv. 5.

deliver from curse and destruction those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them, by Christ, to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour."[q] But being the emblem of Divine Sovereignty, which is secret to us, the rod is associated with the staff, whereby we may understand the sure word of promise, the whole chain and tenor of the exceeding great and precious promises, the assurance of eternal salvation to all that are in Christ Jesus; that to which "we do well that we take heed, as to a light that shineth in a dark place."[r] The "rod" is that which determines; the "staff" that which ratifies and confirms. "The foundation of the Lord standeth sure," having the seal which answers to the rod, "The Lord knoweth them that are His;" but coupling with

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[q] Art. xvii. On Predestination and Election.

[r] 2 Peter i. 19.

it another, which corresponds equally with the staff, "Let him that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."[s]

It may indeed be asked, and not without good shew of reason, how we are to derive comfort from the exercise of that Divine prerogative, which belongs exclusively to the Shepherd, and which, as our Church teaches, is "secret" from the sheep. To this it may be replied, that however secret the purpose of God may be, His working—the inward mighty working of His Spirit—may be known and read of all men. "They," declares our Church, "which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God, be called, according to God's purpose, by His Spirit, working in due season: through grace they obey the calling; they be justified thereby; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image

[s] 2 Tim. ii. 19.

of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works."[t] If, then, to reverse the order here observed, we have "walked religiously in good works," from a principle of duty towards God, and love for Christ, however large a portion of the alloy of our natural corruption may have mingled itself with our best and holiest services; if we have delighted and desired to bear, beyond all human titles of dignity and honour, the precious name of Christ, as children of God by faith in Him; if we have been conscious of the inward movements and monitions of the Spirit of God, prompting us to restrain and mortify the flesh, to hold the appetites in fetters, and put even the affections under strict control; if we have departed from the maxims and the customs of "a world that lieth in wickedness," in that we

[t] Art. xvii.

have taken chief thought for the things that pertained to our eternal peace, and sought first "the kingdom of God, and His righteousness;" all these are so many sure indications, that He, whom we love "hath first loved us; that He whom we have found, had first sought us; that He, while yet we knew him not, had determined on our deliverance, and ordered to this issue all the events of life, not excepting those which at the time seemed evil, adverse, and disastrous. Never, then, we may be assured, will He who hath made us what we are, leave us or forsake us till He hath made us what we ought to be, "vessels of honour, meet for the master's use;"[u]—trees of righteousness, "the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified thereby"[w]—jewels, destined to sparkle with undimmed and undecaying brilliancy in

[u] 2 Tim. ii. 20. [w] Isaiah lxi. 3.

the Redeemer's eternal crown. How much of this work, indeed, may be reserved for the valley of the shadow of death: how far the process of purifying may require the furnace of affliction to be heated beyond its wont, is not for man to say; but of this at least St. Paul was confident, that "He who had begun a good work in His people would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."[y] The rod of His power, once extended in their behalf, will not be drawn back, until the ransomed of the Lord have found a safe passage across the swelling waters, and are landed in safety on the calm and peaceful shore. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou passest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee: I have

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[y] Phil. i. 6.

chosen thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine!"[z]

With regard, indeed, to this exercise of Divine Power—to the stretching forth the rod of God, first, to mark the chosen sheep even in the wilderness, and to bring him home to the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul—"He that believeth hath the witness in himself."[a] With the comfort of the "rod," however; the comfort, that is, of beholding, in the retrospect of past life, how all things have wrought together for our good; and combined, when we least expected it, to accomplish the gracious purpose which He had purposed from the beginning; will be associated the comfort also of the "staff." We shall find in the word of God all that is needed for the sustenance and for the healing, and for the assurance of the soul. "Christ Jesus

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[z] Isaiah xliii. 1. [a] 1 John v. 10.

is made of God unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption."[b] "Fear not, little flock," He proclaims; "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom: whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, I will do it. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world, and in Me ye shall have peace."[c] The race may be arduous, but the prize is sure: the struggle may be protracted, but the triumph is prepared. "Why then are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"[d] Can the billows ingulph you, while I am near, to say unto the raging waters, Peace, be still? Can the deep swallow you up, while I am present to control

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[b] 1 Cor. i. 30.

[c] Luke xii. 32; John xvi. 33.

[d] Matt. viii. 26.

its fury, and to quell its pride? Can death affright you when I have taken away the sting of death; in that "I have redeemed you from the curse of the law, being made a curse for you?" Why then art thou fearful, O thou of little faith? Fight thou the good fight—finish thy course—keep the faith. I have laid up for thee a crown of righteousness, which I will give thee in that day:[e] and in the meantime possess thou thy soul in peace, directed by the "rod" of my purpose, and defended by the "staff" of my word. Be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in My work; for in Me thy labour shall not be in vain: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."[f]

One kind of trial, indeed, which will assuredly encounter us in our Christian

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[e] 2 Tim. iv. 8.

[f] 1 Cor. xv. 58; and Rev. ii. 10.

warfare, has not yet been glanced at: the assaults which are made upon the believer by the enemies of his soul. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." These enemies, it will be seen, are severally, the "fleshly lusts that war against the soul;"[g] our "adversary, the devil, who goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;"[h] and the children of this world, the men of this generation, who "have their portion in the present life;"[i] hating the servant, as they once hated the Master; persecuting the disciple, as once they crucified the Lord. But here, too, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith:"[k] the shield of faith is endued with power to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. Taking

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[g] 1 Peter ii. 11. [h] 1 Peter v. 9.
[i] Luke xvi. 8; Psalm. [k] 1 John v. 4.

unto ourselves the whole armour of God, we shall be enabled "to withstand throughout the evil day, and having done all to stand:"[l] while the language is already recorded, which we shall adopt for our own, at the close, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who hath loved us!"[m]

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[l] Eph. vi. 13. [m] Rom. viii. 37.

CHAPTER V.

The Provision.

THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES: THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP RUNNETH OVER.

WE have seen, in the preceding verse, what provision has been made by the Good Shepherd for the sheep of His fold, under the pressure of severe affliction, in the extremity of human trial, yea, even in the last struggle of expiring nature, as each and all of these may be symbolized by "the valley of the shadow of death." We observed, at the same time, that this most impressive image might be applied to that dejection and depression of the spirit, which

is a "bitterness the heart only knoweth," as well as to that "great fight of afflictions," which makes him who is engaged in it, like David, or like Paul, "a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men."[a] When Paul commemorates his rescue from the mouth of the lion, he employs this remarkable language, which is literally and most strikingly illustrative of the words of the Psalmist; "Who hath delivered us from so great a death and *doth* deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us."[b] We are led, therefore, by the words now under review, as they relate to the further progress of the sheep of Christ through the wilderness of this world, to contemplate the believer after he has been rescued from the pressure of stern adversity, or the power of strong temptation.

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[a] 1 Cor. iv. 9. [b] 2 Cor. i. 10.

In passing the "valley of the shadow of death," he may be grievously molested and impeded by the enemies of his peace; but his Good Shepherd "provideth him a table before them all;" sustains him in the exercise of all his privileges, in the enjoyment of all his comforts, in the assurance of the ultimate fulfilment of all his bright and holy expectations. And this is accomplished, so to speak, in the very "presence" of the enemy and avenger, subdued and "stilled" of God. What then, first, in the spiritual application of the Psalm, are the enemies here intended; and what is the provision made by the Good Shepherd for the strengthening and refreshing of the souls of His people, in despite and in defiance of them all?

We have already seen that the enemies of the believer are threefold: the flesh, which would deceive, and the world, which would beguile, and the devil,

who would destroy. The flesh would deceive the sheep of Christ's flock while they are in the fold: the world would beguile them beyond it, and then "their adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour."[d] He cannot "enter in at the door of the sheepfold," for he dreads the "Shepherd of the sheep," by whom he has been already foiled and overcome: but he lurks around it, like the thievish wolf, with intent to "steal, and to kill, and to destroy."[e] Of these enemies, however, the flesh is the most specious, the most subtle, and therefore the most perilous. "The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" and to the question, "Who can know it?" we can but reply in the words of Holy Writ, "I the Lord search

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[d] 1 Peter v. 8. [e] John x. 10.

the heart."[f] The Shepherd knows it, though the sheep know it not; and although the "flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that we cannot do the things that we would;"[g] yet, whenever we are conscious of the strife; whenever our principles and our purposes are with the Spirit; whenever we can truly say, with the Apostle Paul, that we still "delight in the law of God after the inward man," and that "*to will* is present with us, even when to perform that which is good we find not;"[h]—then, like him, we have One to rescue, who will surely deliver us from "the body of this death;"—our Good Shepherd, ever watchful, ever nigh, will overcome in us and for us "the carnal mind, which is enmity against

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[f] Jeremiah xvii. 10. [g] Gal. v. 17.

[h] Rom. viii. 18, 22.

God."[i] He will produce in us the spiritual mind, which is "life and peace." He will make us to realize the leading of the Spirit of God, to feel that we are Sons of God, "the Spirit itself bearing witness with our Spirit, that we are not children only, but heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."[k] And thus, though still bearing about with him a body of sin and death; still continuing in this tabernacle, wherein the Apostle says, "we do groan, being burdened;"[l] still seeking to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection; the believer will nevertheless be enabled to enquire, "If God be for us, who shall be against us?" and to demand, even in presence of his enemies, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect: is it not God that justifieth? Who is he that condemn-

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[i] Rom. viii. 7. [k] Rom. viii. 16, 17.
[l] 2 Cor. v. 4.

eth? Is it not Christ that died?"[m] Thus, then, the best and fullest exposition of the text of the Psalmist is to be found in the recorded experience of St. Paul, than whom no one ever more sensibly felt, or more accurately and graphically delineated, the conflict with the flesh. Nor can we be surprised at this: not only "as face answereth to face in the waterbrooks, so answereth the heart of man to man;"[n] but there was, in the case now before us, a peculiar natural similitude. St. Paul was, like David, a man of most sanguine temperament, most susceptible feelings, most warm affections; animated, zealous, ardent in every pursuit; conversant too with all forms of trial, and with all varieties of circumstance, and of course with either extreme of destitution and abundance. "I know," he wrote to the Philippians, "I know

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[m] Rom. viii. 34. [n] Prov. xxvii. 19.

both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."[o] And the state of extreme abasement and destitution may well correspond with passing through the valley of the shadow of death; while the refreshment and replenishment of the soul, causing it, as St. Paul says, "to be filled with comfort, to be exceeding joyful in all its tribulation," is "the table prepared" for him by God in "the presence of his enemies." For what was his worldly condition when he indited the words, "I am full and abound?" Was he not still a prisoner of Christ Jesus, an ambassador in bonds, immured in the gloomy recesses of a dungeon at Rome, and with no prospect before him as to the present life, but of eventual martyr-

[o] Phil. iv. 12.

dom? And yet, notwithstanding this, he could write in a strain of thankfulness and of triumph, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened to me have fallen out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel, so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Every way Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."[p] We may well pause to look upon such a spectacle as this: for we can conceive no more illustrious example of the complete subjection of the flesh, and the triumphant ascendancy of the indomitable spirit of faith,

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[p] Phil. i. 12, 19.

than that which is thus exhibited in the personal experience of this great Apostle. We can conceive of no "table" more richly "spread" than his must have been even "in the presence" of manifold and malignant "enemies;" and we know that still, where there are the same enemies, there will be the same conflict; and where there is the same conflict, there may be the same faith; and where there is the same faith, there will be the same succour; and where there is the same succour, there will be the same triumph. "Yea, in all things" shall believers, whether prophets, or evangelists, or apostles, or martyrs, or but in comparison as hewers of wood and drawers of water in the great spiritual temple—the house of their God; in all such things shall believers, however weak and frail in themselves—if only faith be kept in exercise, and find its appropriate utterance in prayer—be made, as Paul

was, "more than conquerors, through the Saviour who hath loved them."[p]

Afflictions, then, rightly endured and improved—endured with the "patience of faith," and improved by the faith of patience, are eminently conducive to the subjection and subordination of the flesh, "The chastening that for the present seemeth not joyous, but grievous, yieldeth in the issue the peaceable fruit of righteousness;"[q] nor can we find a fitter solution of the apparent paradox of the Apostle James, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation,"[r] than in the fact, that "our flesh being thus subdued to the Spirit, we better obey His godly motions in righteousness and true holiness."[s] The flesh, however, is an enemy not only lodged, but settled and seated

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[p] Rom. viii. 37. [q] Heb. xii. 11.

[r] James i. 12.

[s] Collect for First Sunday in Lent.

within; it cannot be altogether excluded and expelled; however frequently and signally foiled, it has peculiar opportunities of resuming the offensive, and returning to the charge. The flesh is not so formidable, however, in a state of complete isolation, as it is in alliance with the world: while the world has little power, if any, to injure the true believer, except when confederate with the flesh. And for this reason: the world lies without the fold, while the flesh intrudes within it; and the flesh must first deceive before the world can successfully mislead or decoy. The sheep of Christ, chosen and marked by Him are, by their very name and character, placed in a great degree beyond the sphere of this world's attraction, and honoured therefore with an abundant measure of its hatred, obloquy, and scorn. "If the world hate you," said Messiah to His disciples, "ye know that it hated Me,

before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."[t] Whenever, therefore, the world exchanges this aspect of hatred and disapproval for bland and alluring smiles; whenever the people of God are courted and flattered by those with whom they have nothing in common except the participation of a sinful nature; they may be assured, not only that the flesh is scheming for the mastery (for *that* it ever is), but that, to a certain degree, it has attained the ascendancy. The world can only begin to attract when the flesh has already prevailed to deceive. Hence the principle of resistance so emphatically laid down by St. Paul, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the

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[t] John xv. 18.

renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."[u] And if it be asked how we are to distinguish and identify the world, there is a prompt and explicit answer:—By its tendency to merge and absorb, in things perishable, the primary and paramount interest that ought ever to be felt in things eternal. It is of the essence of the world, that "the fashion thereof passeth away;"[x] and though there may be very much of the world that is not positively and essentially sinful, yet who hath not learnt by experience, that things which are not evil in their nature may yet be evil in their excess? "Love not the world," said the Apostle John, "neither the things of the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father

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[u] Rom. xii. 2. [x] 1 John ii. 17.

is not in him."[y] And though we do not infer from this, that Christians are to go out of the world—the very contrary of which is implied by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians[z]—yet we *do* infer that they are to walk very cautiously and "circumspectly"[a] within it; and to be especially on their guard, lest their unavoidable intermixture and association with it tend to weaken, or disturb, or disarrange the great principle of adjustment in the scale of duties, and betray them into placing the first, last; or the last, first. We need not suppose the Apostle John to recommend what he himself did not practise—an entire abstraction from the pursuits of the world, or a stoical indifference to the appetites of the body; but we cannot avoid construing his words to imply that the be-

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[y] 1 John ii. 15. [z] 2 Cor. v. 10.

[a] Eph. v. 15.

liever is to acquire and to retain the mastery over all; to regulate the employment of his substance; and to control the indulgence of his inclination by the principles developed in the word of God. When the believer in Christ is charged with the responsible trust of affluence, he ought to spend, as well as to spare, for the public good. He ought to provide the industrious with labour as well as the needy with bread. It is not in themselves that "the purple and the fine linen and the sumptuous fare," if the proper accompaniments and appendages of our station, are to be denounced or even discountenanced. They are only evil, when they lead to the forgetfulness of what is due to others. David was not the less a Prince, because he was a Prophet; nor did Cornelius cease to be "a man having authority" when he became a disciple of Christ. Theophilus continued to be "most excellent," Gaius and Phi-

lemon to be wealthy and hospitable; Sergius Paulus to exercise, though on different principles and for different purposes than before, his high function of deputy or governor of Cyprus. The world is only *then* the believer's enemy, when it comes between him and his God; and it is his legitimate sphere of duty and occupation, during many of his waking hours, on the supposition that it does not withdraw him from the fold. Only let the flesh be kept under subjection, and the world will have little power to do harm. St. Paul's abundance was no more detrimental to his best interests than his destitution, because in both he remembered and recognized the Lord Christ. There is, however, another enemy to the believer, to whom the name of enemy in a special sense belongs—even the accuser of the Brethren, "the Prince and God of this world, the spirit that now worketh, and

shall ever work, in the children of disobedience."[b]

We do not indeed purpose, in this part of our meditations, to limit and define the powers, the properties, and the attributes of the fallen spirit, the enemy of God and man. We would not even investigate the mode in which he conducts his operations against the human soul; whether it be by innumerable agents acting in subordination to himself, as their head; or through the multiplication of his own infernal presence by some mysterious and unknown attribute of which we only know that it is not Omnipresence, for then he would be God. It is enough for us to know, practically, that he who assailed the Master is also the adversary of the servant; *he* seeks the ruin of the disciple who once presumed to test the firmness and the faithfulness

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[b] Eph. ii. 2.

of the Lord. He who "desired to have Peter,"[c] and who succeeded in betraying and beguiling Judas; he, who multiplied thorns and trials and temptations in hope to shake the steadfastness and the constancy of Paul; *he* is ever mysteriously at hand, to take advantage of every deviation from the right path; to array, in the most alluring colours, the world without—and what is still more dangerous, to stimulate into strong excitement and rouse into active operation, the flesh within. The nature of his machinations is glanced at by St. Paul, when he says, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." And again, "I fear lest, by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."[d] And

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[c] Luke xxii. 31. [d] 2 Cor. xi. 1.

are we, any more than the Corinthians, ignorant of the devices of Satan? Are we unacquainted with the disguises and the transformations through which he carries on his schemes against the soul of man? If we are, we *should* not be; for this at least we know, that they have all one view, one object, and it is, to intercept the view of the cross. It is, to hide Christ from the vision of the soul. It is, "to build again the wall of partition which grace hath broken down."[e] It is, to generate within the heart a spirit of self-righteousness, which shall cause us to trust in ourselves, or a spirit of infidelity, which shall cause us to rest satisfied without any trust at all. It is, to allure the sheep from the fold of the Good Shepherd; to beguile it beyond the sound of His warning voice; and if it were possible, beyond the range also

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[e] Eph. ii. 14.

of His protecting arm. But this, happily for the sheep, is NOT possible. We have already heard Him declare, "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand;" and since we know that the "Good Shepherd hath given His life for the sheep," *that* life must be counterpoised with an equivalent before He will resign what was the "travail of His soul,"[f] and relinquish what was the purchase of His blood. This, however, which involves the sure discomfiture of the foe, and the certain deliverance of the sheep, does not render the error less heartily deprecated, or cause it to be the less carefully avoided by the people of the Lord; and for this reason: How do they know that they are the sheep, but because they "hear the Shepherd's voice?"[g] And if they listen for it, and hear it not, then

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[f] Isaiah liii. 11. [g] John x. 27

they know that they have gone astray, and the first discovery of the wandering operates as the first impulse to return. "Whom resist," exhorts the Apostle Peter, "stedfast in the faith."[h] And again, "Taking the shield of faith," said the Apostle Paul, "wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."[i] This shield, then, the believer has always in possession, if not always in actual employment; it is ready for his need, so soon as the need itself shall become apparent; and never will the devices of Satan succeed where it is caught up on the first intimation of the enemy's approach; and the detection of the sin is associated with the invocation of the Saviour. The Great Captain of our salvation is ever present to the rescue; and so far is the enemy from having power over the children of God,

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[h] 1 Peter v. 9. [i] Eph. vi. 16.

to deprive them of the food of the soul, that even in his "presence a table is prepared" for the brotherhood of Christ, where they drink of the blood of the grape of the True Vine, and feed upon "the Bread of God, which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world."[k]

Here, then, we perceive the provision which has been made by the Good Shepherd for the strengthening and refreshing of His sheep in the very proximity and presence of the enemy of their souls. "Thou preparest a table before me in presence of mine enemies." This was literally the case of the many thousands of Israel, when God clave the skies in order to sustain them in the wilderness, "and rained upon them angels' food," while their enemies lay dead upon the sea shore.[l] And if, spiritually, *our* enemies

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[k] John vii. 51. [l] Psalm lxxviii. 24, 25.

are those who cannot die, or who die only with ourselves, at least the table is spread before them by a like exercise of power; and though all are present as spectators, yet the flesh is subdued, the world is silenced, the enemy is made "still as a stone." This is true at once in a general and in a special sense. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," said the Apostle Paul to the Church at Rome, "and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof."[m] And when this injunction is obeyed, even though obedience to it be taught only by the experience acquired in the valley of the shadow of death, God will Himself make provision by His Spirit. He will form Christ within the heart, "the Hope of Glory." He will awaken devout affections which shall "put gladness in the heart far beyond the increase

[m] Rom. xiii. 14.

of corn and wine and oil."[n] He will inspire such anticipations of "the rest that remaineth"[o] for His people, as shall greatly more than counterbalance any privation or effort that the mastering of the flesh may demand. "I reckon," said St. Paul, "that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."[p] While the grace in which the believer stands is itself the beginning of that glory; for "we know," said St. Paul, "that when our earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."[q] Tasting then that the Lord is gracious; having these "exceeding great and precious promises;" feeling that "our iniquities are forgiven, our sins

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[n] Psalm iv. 7.
[o] Heb. iv. 9.
[p] Rom. viii. 18.
[q] 2 Cor. v. 1.

covered,"[r] the record of our transgressions blotted out of the book of God's remembrance, our errors and our frailties made as though they had never been, we become delivered "from the corruption that is in the world through lust,"[s] and we contemplate the weakness of its strongest, and the foolishness of its wisest, and the brevity of its most enduring, and the emptiness of its most specious and attractive, in contrast with the "things which God hath prepared for them that love Him;" things of which the expectancy enhances all present enjoyment, as the possession will transcend all expectation. That "the fashion of the world passeth away," even its own votaries cannot deny; but while the pageant shall continue to revolve, the children of light will take the same interest and pleasure in all that is law-

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[r] Psalm xxxii. 1. [s] 2 Peter i. 4.

ful to look upon, as do others. They may be compared to men walking through a garden filled with fruits and flowers of unknown properties, but withheld by a secret instinct—an impulse, of which they alone are conscious—from plucking aught that is noxious and pernicious. The "table of the Lord" is spread with that which is at once grateful to the sense, and salutary to the soul. "Thy loving-kindness is better than life," said the Psalmist, "therefore my lips shall praise Thee." [t] Believers may not in all cases realize as they ought this strengthening and refreshing of the soul; but that they *ought* to realize it is manifest; or why should St. Paul address himself to an entire church, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say rejoice." [u] There can be no doubt that at Philippi, where the

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[t] Psalm xxxvi. 7. [u] Phil. iv. 4.

Apostle had been scourged and shamefully entreated, there was the full measure of peril and persecution, of obloquy and reproach, to be expected and endured by the disciples; yet was there "a table spread for them in the very presence of their enemies," of which their enemies were not aware, like those companions of St. Paul, "who saw indeed the light, but heard not," said the Apostle, "the voice of Him that spake."[x] The persecutors were constrained to look upon the patience, the firmness, the fortitude, and the forbearance of believers; but the cause was one which they could not apprehend and appreciate aright. "*They* might well take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, who knew in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance."[y] This knowledge, then, communicated by wisdom

[x] Acts xxii. 9. [y] Heb. x. 34.

that cannot err, and confirmed by faithfulness that will not lie; this assurance, that "all things are at all times working together for their good;" this conviction, that all is tending to the "end of faith, which is the salvation of the soul;"[z]—this is the strength and this the support of the believer amidst all vicissitudes and visitations; and the more entirely, the more exclusively he is thus cast upon Christ, the more clearly, the more convincingly will it be proved, that the "bread of heaven," which is the food of the soul, is "that which endureth unto everlasting life;"[a] and that, be outward circumstances or appearances what they may, the darkness will be exchanged for the light, and the bitter for the sweet, and the evil for the good, while thus we look by faith "not to the things which are seen, but to the things which

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[z] 1 Peter i. 9. [a] John vi. 27.

are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."[b]

Such, then, is the general application of the passage—such the provision made by the Good Shepherd for sustaining and supporting His people "in the presence of their enemies." To this the Patriarch referred, when he said, "I have loved the words of Thy mouth more than my necessary food;"[c] and the Psalmist, when he declared, "I am as glad of Thy word, as one that findeth great spoil."[d] There is, however, a special application which might not be distinctly present to the mind of the Psalmist, but which we cannot forbear to adopt when we remember the emphatic words of our Master, "My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed."[e] On

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[b] 2 Cor. iv. 18.
[c] Job xxiii. 12.
[d] Psalm cxix. 162.
[e] John vi. 55.

this ground we affix even a sacramental meaning to the passage. Our table is spread with the Bread of Life, and garnished with the cup of salvation—we eat by faith the flesh, and drink by faith the blood of our Divine Shepherd, wherein "we think we have eternal life;"—and we cannot but believe that there is a peculiar sweetness and solace in the symbols of the Redeemer's dying love to those who have suffered with Him, or for Him, or like Him. This we ground on St. Paul's assurance, that "where sufferings abound, consolation also aboundeth in Christ,"[f] To those, then, who "suffer according to the will of God, and commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator,"[g] the Holy Communion is doubly commemorative; first, of the crowning mercy, the consummating gift which is common

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[f] 2 Cor. i. 5. [g] 1 Pet. iv. 19.

to all believers, and then of their own especial and covenanted interest therein —that, "if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."[h] They feel, in a personal sense, that they are thus partakers of their Lord's "baptism of blood;"[i] "sealed by the Holy Ghost unto the day of redemption;"[k] isolated from the world, even while abiding in the world; in things spiritual exalted above it, though in things temporal incorporated with it, having a peace within which it could not give, and which it cannot take away —which it hath no power to shake, much less to subvert. The sacramental board is especially to such (as generally to all who believe,) the "table spread in the presence of their enemies." The world looks on with affected scorn, but with real self-condemnation; and the

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[h] 2 Tim. ii. 12.
[i] Luke xii. 50.
[k] Eph. v. 30.

enemy of man finds no Judas among the elect people of God into whom he can enter; for the Shepherd is there to protect His sheep—to defend them against all others, and to keep them on the watch against themselves. For it is the flesh, here again, which can prevail far more than either the world or the devil to vitiate the banquet of the Lord: but then the flesh is only powerful from the forgetfulness of our own frailty, or our unwillingness, when it is perceived, to resist it. Only then let the first perception of its unseasonable intrusion lead to prompt resistance, and the effect of its struggles shall simply be to teach us a profitable lesson of humility; to secure us from "thinking that we stand," and stimulate us to "take heed lest we fall;" to enhance our longing after that heavenly feast, to which approaching in faith, our souls are strengthened and refreshed; and to confirm in us the

cheering confidence, that He "who hath begun the good work in us will perform it unto the day of Christ,"[l] for His own mercy, and for His dear Son's sake.

We must return, however, from the simple but impressive solemnities of the Christian banquet, to the more complex ceremonial of a Jewish feast, that we may illustrate the two remaining clauses of this verse, which are symbolical expressions of great force and beauty. "Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." Now this symbolic act of "anointing" was ordained in the beginning by God Himself, when Moses was commanded to anoint Aaron to the office of the priesthood;[m] and it is always employed in Scripture as the emblem of authority received direct from God in the person of the Prophet, Priest,

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[l] Phil. i. 6. [m] Levit. viii.

or King. It will imply, therefore, in the connection of this Psalm, that the believer is not only a permitted guest at his Lord's table, but an honoured, a welcome, an acceptable visitant there; and *this*, not only occasionally, but constantly; that he has access at all times into the immediate presence of the Great King; that the palace of the Divine Majesty is not only his Refuge for shelter, his resort on occasions of emergency, but "the Habitation which his soul loveth;" the Home of which he may say, without presumption and without reproof, "It is good for me to be here: here will I dwell, for I have a delight herein."[n] It intimates that the guidance and direction of the influence of the Holy Spirit shall never be wanting to him, whether to guard him against all error, or to guide him into all truth;

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[n] Luke ix. 33; Psalm cxxxii. 14.

and this, indeed, is expressly declared by the Apostle John under the very same similitude: "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things."[o] Thus then we are taught of God to associate here, also, the outward and visible sign of anointing with oil, and the inward and spiritual grace, the unction from the Holy One: and though such is the frailty and infirmity of man, that there is no part of his course, from the entrance at the strait gate to the attainment of the crown of life, in which the believer can stand by his own strength, or walk by his own wisdom, or persevere by his own firmness, or overcome by his own fortitude, yet the Good Shepherd, according to the same authority, has provided against this peril on behalf of His own Sheep. "The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you,

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[o] 1 John ii. 20.

and ye need not that any man teach you: except as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you from the beginning, ye shall abide in Him."[p] Connecting this therefore with the Lord's own words, "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth,"[q] we take the whole to imply, that with the doing of Christ's will shall be associated the knowledge of Christ's doctrine; and that the believer's perceptions of truth, however deficient he may be in other kinds of knowledge, shall become, under the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit, so accurate, so exact, so accordant with the revealed word, that no false teaching of man shall ever be able to pervert them. He shall "know all things," which go of necessity to make up the knowledge which is "life eternal."

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[p] 1 John ii. 27. [q] John xvii. 17.

While by the concurrent image, the replenishing of the cup until it overflows, must be intended, beside the freeness of his admission to the heavenly banquet of the soul, the fulness of his supply. "The cup running over" assures us, that "no good thing shall be withheld from them that walk uprightly;" [r]—"that while the young lions do lack and suffer hunger, they that seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good." [s] A provision has been made for all their wants, which shall develope its abundance in proportion to the emergency, just as St. Paul declared to the Philippian church, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." [t] This, indeed, as we have already seen, does not promise that the cup of affliction shall be empty, but that

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[r] Psalm lxxxiv. 11. [s] Psalm xxxiv. 10.
[t] Phil. iv. 19.

the cup of promise shall be full—that though the ingredients of the one are bitter, the other shall be proportionably sweet—that "though the chastening seemeth for the present not joyous, but grievous, it shall yield," in the issue, "the peaceable fruit of righteousness;" nay, that there shall be the rich wine, so to speak, extracted from those bitter herbs till the cup runneth over, according to the recorded experience of the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes. Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Thy word."[u] The anointing of oil, then, represents our freedom of access; the cup running over, our abundant supply in Him who is the fulness of the Godhead bodily—the "fulness of Him who filleth all in all!"[x]

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[u] Psalm cxix. 67, 71. [x] Eph. i. 23.

Are we then conscious "of the presence of our enemies," and do we partake, even before them, of the "table which the Lord hath spread?" Conscious of their presence we must be, for it were indeed an evil omen if we were, or imagined ourselves to be, for any long interval at least, conscious of their absence. The endeavour to "walk in the Spirit" must at all times provoke the rebellious struggles of the flesh; and if, "when we would do good," evil is not sensibly "present with us," it must be because evil has assumed the semblance of good, and we embrace, without an effort, what is not a substance but a shadow. In a greater or less degree, "iniquity cleaveth to our holiest things;" and whoever may be the apparent and immediate aggressor, the real seat of danger is the heart. Therefore we are admonished by the wise Solomon, to "keep the heart above all keeping, for out of it are the issues of

life;"[y] and therefore are we comforted and cheered with the assurance, while we endeavour so to do, that even if through the frailty of our nature, and the sudden irruption of strong temptation, the heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things, while, if the heart condemn us not, we have confidence with God."[z] But we have a direction calculated to secure our safety. "This I say then; walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."[a] And what is it to walk in the Spirit, but to look habitually, in prayer, for His direction; and to listen habitually in the ministry of the word, for His voice; and to seek counsel habitually from His word, as from the oracles of God. The perception of the presence of the enemy will cause us to look for the presence of

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[y] Prov. iv. 23. [z] 1 John iii. 20, 21.
[a] Gal. v. 16.

the Defender; and thus conflict becomes the evidence of grace; it becomes the prelude to the victory; it becomes us to realize the test so authoritatively declared by St. John: "Hereby we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us."[b] Can the flesh ever be annihilated, can the world ever be excluded, can the enemy be ever wholly banished on this side the grave? No! we can only look away from them and beyond them to the table which the Lord hath prepared; we can only partake by faith of the "bread of heaven, which cometh down from above, and giveth life to the world," and vigour to the soul; we can only receive the cup of salvation, and advance in the strength of that spiritual meat and of that spiritual drink until we reach the holy mount of God.[c] We can only by thus waiting upon the Lord,

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[b] 1 John iii. 24. [c] 1 Kings xix. 8.

"renew our strength;" we can only thus shew forth our Lord's death till He come,"[d] and in the commemoration of His death seek the confirmation of our life; we can only look, from the bread that crowns the board and the wine that mantles in the cup, to that precious body and blood which they symbolize, and which "whosoever eateth and drinketh by faith, hath everlasting life;"[e] we can only thus receive from time to time, the unction of the Holy One, by which we learn to know all things that concern our eternal peace; and the replenishment of that cup which overflows with mercy, and of which the bitterest ingredients are but blessings in disguise. One way, then, and the chief way, to overcome our enemies is to seek a refuge from them at the table of the Lord. It is by partaking aright the flesh of Christ, that

[d] 1 Cor. xi. 26. [e] John vi. 54.

our own flesh will be subdued to the Spirit, for we cannot "be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils."[f] Thus if we do not always realize a perceptible increase of "joy and peace in believing," we shall always be strengthened in our opposition to that which is evil; confirmed in our attachment and adherence to that which is good; more impressed with the sense of our own inherent frailty, and of the *sole* sufficiency and *all* sufficiency of Christ our Lord. Thus, by the Divine Blessing abiding upon this His own especial ordinance, we shall become more and more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light until we exchange the feast here "spread, in presence of our enemies," for that marriage supper of the Lamb, where the enemies can intrude themselves no more; where none shall be

[f] 1 Cor. x. 21.

present but God the Father of us all, and Christ, the Good Shepherd of the sheep, and the Divine Spirit of life and love, and the bright array of Cherubim and Seraphim, and "the general assembly and church of the First Born, and the spirits of the just made perfect;"[g] and there shall be, throughout eternity, but one fold and one Shepherd, and the fold shall be heaven, for the Shepherd shall be Christ!

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[g] Heb. xii. 22, 23, 24.

CHAPTER VI.

The Consummation.

SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE; AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOR EVER.

WE have seen, in the comment upon the verse immediately preceding, that provision has been made for all the wants of God's people, by the "table," which has been richly "spread" for them, even "in the presence of their enemies." We have seen that the "anointing of the head with oil" denotes the freedom of their access, and "the cup running over" the abundance of their supply. We are now to investigate the security which we possess for the continuance of these benefits unto the end. Such a security was

possessed and realized, beyond all doubt by the Psalmist, for he declares, "Mercy and goodness shall follow me all the days of my life;" and assuredly the same or rather even a stronger security must belong to us, because we are privileged to appropriate certain "exceeding great and precious promises,"[a] which did not, when David wrote, form any portion of the revealed word of truth. Thus, we read, "My people shall never be ashamed. They shall not be confounded that wait for Me."[b] "I am the Lord: I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."[c] While the "Gospel of grace and truth, by our Lord Jesus Christ," is replete with assurances to the same effect, which if there be only enough of faith to apply, there can never be enough of affliction to exhaust. "My

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[a] 2 Peter i. 4. [b] Isaiah xlix. 23.
[c] Mal. iii. 6.

sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." He hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." So that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me."[d] Thus the security consists, not only in the explicitness of the promise, as addressed to *us*, but in the character of the Divine Attributes themselves, which are impledged for its fulfilment. It is because God "changeth not;" because "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever;"[e] because it is "the Eternal Spirit" through whom we offer ourselves to God, and from whom we look for the wisdom unto salvation. For *this* it is that we can say, as the

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[d] John x. 29, and xv. 7; Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

[e] Heb. xiii. 8.

Psalmist did, with confidence, "Goodness and mercy SHALL follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

One inference from these words, and a most consoling and encouraging inference it is, will be found in the fact that the perseverance of the sheep unto the end, and his continuance in the fold by the way, depends upon the Shepherd, not himself. All infirmities, by which he may be "sore let and hindered in running the race set before him,"[f] are already known to, and already anticipated by, the Good Shepherd. The path, which he treads, leads directly to the heavenly Zion; and if he be followed in it by goodness and mercy, no hostile power can overpass this twofold barrier, or can pass it only to inflict such a wound as shall impart renewed strength by the

[f] Collect for Fourth Sunday in Advent.

healing, and to insinuate only such apparent evil as shall be eventually more than "overcome with good." We may, however, best illustrate this by an example. Mark, afterwards the Evangelist, had yielded in evil hour to the suggestion of an unbelieving and mistrustful heart, which led him to desert his apostolical companion in the time of trial;[g] but Mark was not permitted utterly and irrevocably to forsake the fold of Christ; and we may well believe that this humiliating exhibition of his indwelling infirmity had subsequently rendered him more vigilant to detect, and more resolute to overcome it, for we subsequently find St. Paul, who had repudiated his companionship as a recreant, desiring him for a coadjutor. "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry."[h] Nor

[g] Acts xv. 38. [h] 2 Tim. iv. 11.

is there the least likelihood—we might almost say possibility—that this view of accompanying mercy and preserving goodness should produce or even tolerate any compromise with known sin, or any neglect of apparent duty. The very manifestation and perception of those Divine attributes will be more or less clear and more or less clouded, in proportion to the degree of consistency maintained or of unwatchfulness allowed. He who becomes weary in well-doing, will become conscious also of diminished satisfaction in the promises, as well as of a less exact observance of the precepts of God's word. "Then are ye made partakers of Christ," said the Apostle Paul, "if ye hold the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end;"[i] and however "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," there can be no doubt that our

[i] Heb. iii. 14.

perception of the inward witness is more clear, our enjoyment of the blessed assurances and anticipations of salvation more lively, in proportion as we give the greater "diligence to make our calling and election sure."[k] It is contrary to reason, as well as repugnant to grace, that the faithful should offend, willingly, the goodness in which they hope, or violate, consciously, the mercy to which they trust. So far, therefore, from "continuing in sin that grace may abound,"[l] it is the very experience of grace which opposes the indulgence of sin; and none will more unfeignedly desire, or more unweariedly pursue what is good, than they who are conscious that when they have done all, they are but unprofitable servants, and can only look to be "justified freely by His grace

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[k] 2 Peter i. 10. [l] Rom. vi. 1.

through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."[m]

Another inference is, that the promise, which is sufficient, is perpetual. "Goodness and mercy shall follow me ALL my days." It has already been observed that we have no internal evidence to ascertain whether this Psalm was indicted at an advanced period of David's life, or whether it was composed while pastoral images and associations were yet fresh upon his memory. He must, however, have been conversant with the song of Moses, the Man of God, where it is written, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, so soon passeth it away, and we are gone."[n] He might, therefore, have extended his view to the full limit of fourscore years;

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[m] Rom. iii. 24. [n] Psalm xc. 10.

but what is even *that* in the estimate of Him to whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day?"[o] The language of the promise to ourselves is, "Even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made and I will bear; yea, even I will carry and will deliver you."[p] We need not, therefore, be afraid of exhausting and outwearying the goodness of God which reacheth to the heavens, or His mercy which endureth for ever, although our days on earth may be prolonged to the extreme bound of human existence; nor need we, on the other hand, if we are His indeed, apprehend that we shall be hurried prematurely away, and before the work is finished which He has given us to do, and the doing of which he will require at our hand. Meetness for life and immortality must be the

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[o] 2 Peter iii. 9. [p] Isaiah xlvi. 4.

result of grace alone; and grace will be given in proportion to the exigence which throws us upon seeking it. There may be at any moment "but a single step between us and death,"[q] but if it be so, we are sure that "the goodness and mercy which shall follow us all our days," will not leave us in the very moment when we are most in need of their exercise. When we are told concerning the "Great Shepherd of the sheep," that "God brought Him again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant,"[r] do we not perceive that, if it be "everlasting," it must be "ordered in all things and sure;"[s] capable of any extension, or of any contraction; of expansion even to the protracted term of the venerable John, who endured to the very close of the century in which his

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[q] 1 Sam. xx. 3.
[r] Heb. xiii. 29.
[s] 1 Kings xxiii. 5.

Master died; or of contraction to an interval brief as that which sufficed for the thief upon the cross, to whom it was said, "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."[t] The engagement of the Psalmist's words does not, it is true, afford the slightest insight into the duration of our allotted time upon earth, but it *does* afford all that we can require to possess for the full assurance of our faith, for the constant replenishment of our hope, for the overcoming of the fear of death. We know that whether the darkly rolling river is far off or whether it is nigh, the promise remains the same, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou passest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. I will make

[t] Luke xxiii. 43.

darkness light before thee, and crooked things straight—these things will I do unto thee; and I will not forsake thee."[u]

We may observe, yet once more, that the provision, which is most sufficient and perpetual, is also certain. "Goodness and mercy SHALL follow me." The Psalmist speaks without the shadow of a misgiving or a doubt: with precisely the same full assurance which the Apostle Paul expresses when he says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to us."[w] And again, "I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."[x] But the Apostle does not confine himself to the expression of the assurance alone:

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[u] Isaiah xliii. 2; xlii. 16.

[w] Rom. viii. 19. [x] 2 Tim. i. 12.

he developes also the principle upon which it is based, "By grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."[y] Grace, indeed, is both goodness and mercy combined in one; and grace expresses not only their operation, but their origin or motive, so far as it can be expressed in words: "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sin, hath quickened us together with Christ."[z] Thus, the very fact of our possessing the quickening or spiritual life, is itself the security for His preserving it, since God can do nothing in vain. "All that the Father giveth me," said Messiah, "shall come unto Me;"[a] and if we are warranted by the suffrage of conscience in concluding that we have come,

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[y] Eph. ii. 8. [z] Eph. ii. 4, 5

[a] John vi. 37.

then, whether we look to the sufficiency of the provision God hath made, to the faithfulness of the promise He hath spoken, or to the abundance of the portion He hath prepared, we cannot for a moment imagine, that any thing would be left wanting to the completeness of so great salvation. "Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" We cannot, then, doubt for an instant the certainty of the promise, and we may therefore pass on to consider the process of its fulfilment. "The goodness and mercy that shall follow" every sheep of the Good Shepherd, and which in Gospel language we have expressed by the single term "grace," will rectify our errors, supply our omissions, help our infirmities, obliterate our offences, and create, cherish, and maintain in us what itself only could impart —"a good hope through grace," a hope "full of immortality."

The grace of the Good Shepherd, then, "follows" His people through the wilderness of this world in order to *rectify their errors*. For into errors, whether through ignorance, or inadvertence, or unwatchfulness, we cannot but fall; and that too not only when we are least conscious of intending, but most cautious to avoid them. We are not, indeed, as St. Paul has said, "ignorant of Satan's devices;" but if he "transform himself into an angel of light," how could we hope to strip off the disguise, and exhibit him in his true lineaments, did not One follow us, whom he can neither deceive nor elude?[b] Our safety lies in the fact, that "the goodness of God endureth yet daily;" that grace is ever at hand to apply the seasonable and salutary check, when the impulse of the mind and will is bent upon deviating from the path of duty.

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[b] 2 Cor. xi. 3, 14, &c.

How often, for example, does the believer, taking a retrospective survey of the past, in the solitude of his secret chamber, or amidst the stillness of the midnight gloom, find that he has admitted some thought or indulged some feeling, or harboured some desire, which, had it been further pursued, would have troubled him as an up-springing "root of bitterness:" would have interposed between him and his Saviour, and thus reared again "the partition wall," which grace had broken down. And where the error has not been positive, or an error of action, it will often be found negative, or an error of omission. Where we have abstained from doing that which we ought not, we still too often find that we have left undone what we ought. Grace, accordingly, not only rectifies our errors, but *supplies our omissions:* it points out where we have failed through deficiency of effort, and stimulates to renewed exertion. It unwinds the clue, so to

speak, by which we thread the dark and devious mazes of unbelief, and enables us to discover wherefore it is that we have shrunk from performing the part allotted to us in the œconomy of grace, and which may be designed by God, for aught that we can tell, to issue in the salvation of a soul, and in "conversion of a sinner from the error of his way, and the hiding of a multitude of sins."[c] And in the case of either kind of error, *grace helps our infirmities*. This, indeed, is the very purpose for which it is expressly said to follow us. "God knoweth our infirmities," said the Psalmist, "and remembereth that we are dust."[d] "Yea," says the Apostle, with even added emphasis, "we have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet

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[c] James v. 20. [d] Psalm ciii. 14.

without sin."[e] When, therefore, we are made aware, by painful and humiliating experience, of the existence of these infirmities, as Moses was, "when he spake unadvisedly with his lips;"[f] and Peter, when he dissembled his intercourse with Gentiles, fearing them of the circumcision;[g] and Paul and Barnabas, when contention waxed sharp between them,[h] and James and John, when the effusion of an intemperate and unsanctified zeal had revealed to them "what manner of spirit they were of;"[i] we should also be made aware of the goodness by which they are mercifully relieved, and we ourselves, though "compassed with infirmity," may be made strong "in our Lord, and in the power of His might,"[k] and not only would no detriment be incurred

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[e] Heb. iv. 15, 16.
[f] Psalm cvi. 33.
[g] Gal. ii. 12, 13.
[h] Acts xv. 39.
[i] Luke ix. 55.
[k] Eph. vi. 10.

(no *permanent* detriment we mean) but rather a permanent benefit would be derived even from our very errors, were we driven by every such consciousness, in the very moment of its developement, to seek for the help laid on Him that is mighty, and who is no less ready to say to the lowliest of His followers, the frailest and feeblest of His flock, than He was to the Apostle Paul himself, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." So that the believer may respond with Paul, "and most gladly will I rather glory in mine infirmities, that Thy spirit, O my Redeemer, may rest upon me—for when I am weak then am I strong"—weak indeed in the frailty of my nature, but strong in the spirit of my Lord![1]

We cannot, however, sum up all the short-comings of the believer even under

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[1] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

the three comprehensive heads *of errors, omissions, and infirmities;* "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults,"[m] was the prayer of the Psalmist—while it is said, concerning true believers, by the Apostle James, that "in many things we offend all."[n] Grace must be at hand, therefore, to *pardon offences also;* to "cleanse from secret faults." In order, consequently, to ensure our comfort and our continuance in the path of life; in order to preserve us from being obstructed by the impediments, or discouraged by the difficulties which we may find therein, it is necessary that the acts of discerning, and of acknowledging, and of renouncing an offence—all which are simultaneous in the true believer—should be associated with the *immediate* assurance of pardon: that the pressure of sin unforgiven, should not rest upon the mind, "but that all

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[m] Psalm xix. 12. [n] James iii. 2.

manner of sin and unrighteousness" should be declared to be "remitted" unto man. This assurance, this declaration, we have conveyed in the most explicit terms, even in the language of the Old Testament: "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy;"[o] much more in the emphatic words of the Apostle John, "If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous—and He is the Propitiation for our sins. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."[p] Here then the necessity involves the advocacy, and the acknowledgment ensures the pardon; and the consciousness of sin, which drives the ungodly man into the world, that he may forget it, draws the penitent to the cross, that he may forsake it. Happy then are they who have an ex-

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[o] Prov. xxviii. 13. [p] 1 John ii. 2; i. 9.

perimental knowledge of this which supersedes the necessity of all argument or demonstration: happy they who know that their sins are forgiven them for His Name's sake; and that however they may be surprised or seduced through the deceitfulness of sin, never shall it prevail to inflict on them any real or lasting injury, so long as they continue to watch against its intrusion, and to contend against its influence. The terms of the promise are explicit, "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace," [q] and grace at once acquires the dominion, though only in death itself does it accomplish the annihilation of sin!

One further reason has been assigned, for which the grace of God follows, and shall follow His people all their days, that it may *create*, *cherish*, *and maintain*

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[q] Rom. vi. 14.

within them "a good hope through grace; a hope that is full of immortality." Hope, we know, is essential to perseverance—to patient continuance in well doing: to the prosecution of the race that is set before us, to the endurance through the conflict in which we are continually engaged, if not with adversaries without, at least with the enemy within. Hence, said the Apostle Paul, "ye are saved by hope;"[r] and hence he intercedes on behalf of the Roman Christians, that the "God of Hope would fill their hearts with joy and peace in believing, that they might abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost."[s] Nor will this language appear too strong, when we consider that hope is the connecting link, as it were, between the life that now is, and the life that is to come. "Hope that is seen," said St. Paul, "is not hope: for what a man seeth, why

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[r] Rom. viii. 24. [s] Rom. xv. 13.

doth he yet hope for? But if we hope," he continues, "for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."[1] In adversity, therefore, we ought to endure through hope of the mercy of God; in prosperity, we ought to rejoice in hope of the glory of God: and both in prosperity and in adversity, we are to look for the hope itself to the grace that gives it birth, sensible, that while we look for the greatest of God's mercies, we are not worthy even of the least; and that it is our part to keep alive the expectation of inheriting His promises, by walking stedfastly in the way of His commandments. "We desire," said the Apostle Paul, "that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience are

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[1] Rom. viii. 24, 25.

inheriting the promises."[u] Here, then, our duty connects itself with God's provision. The calling and election is His: ours must be the "diligence to make it sure;" and if we are indeed convinced, with the Psalmist, "that goodness and mercy shall not only follow us all the days of our life, but that grace shall abide with us *to* the end and *in* the end, then wherefore not take to ourselves, in all its fulness, the exhortation of the Apostle to the Church at Corinth, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labour is not in vain in the Lord?"[w]

Are we then sensible, throughout our pilgrimage, of the companionship of grace? In the time of trial, do we look to grace for support; in the time of adversity, for solace; in the time of weak-

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[u] Heb. vi. 11, 12. [w] 1 Cor. xv. 58.

ness, for strength; and in the time of conflict, for victory? "God," said the Psalmist, "is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will we not fear."[x] And if *he* feared not, nor his people, ought *we* to fear, to whom Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever—we, to whom He hath said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world?" Ah, surely, however want of faith may cause *us* to *fear*, it will never cause *Him* to *fail*. So long as we have but faith sufficient to lift, however feebly, the supplicating cry, "Lord, save us," there can be no doubt of receiving the same deliverance, though it may be accompanied with the same gentle and touching expostulation, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"[y] "Faithful is

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[x] Psalm xlvi. 1. [y] Matt. xiv. 31.

He that calleth us, who also will do it;" and the ground of assurance for the future should be found in the retrospection of the past. If "goodness and mercy SHALL follow us," as they *have* followed us, "all the days of our life," how can we imagine that their work is done, until they have brought us in triumph to the "House of the Lord," to "dwell" therein "for ever!"

Thus have we traced the true believer, the adopted child of God's family and fold, the recovered sheep of Christ's fold, throughout the various stages of his earthly pilgrimage; we have seen the same "goodness and mercy," by which he was originally reclaimed from among the multitude who go astray, following him with sure guidance and safe guardianship "all the days of his life;" and we have now only to consider, by way of conclusion, what shall be the portion of his eternal inheritance, and what the cha-

racter of his exceeding great reward, "I will dwell in the House of the Lord for ever."

There can be no doubt whatever, that David, when he spake thus, had primary reference to the tabernacle of the Lord at Jerusalem, "whither," he said, "the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the Name of the Lord."[z] How deeply, how devotedly, David loved "the habitation of God's House, and the place where His honour dwelleth;" how ardently he longed and panted to behold it, when an unwilling exile in a foreign land, we know from his own impassioned exclamation, "O, how amiable are Thy tabernacles, Thou Lord of Hosts. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? O send out Thy light and

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[z] Psalm cxxii. 4.

Thy truth; let them lead me; let them guide me to Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacle."[a] But it is scarcely less clear, that David regarded the tabernacle or temple of the Lord, not only in a literal and substantial, but in a prophetical and emblematic sense; that he looked upon it as symbolizing "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."[b] Had he not so regarded it, how could he have added, "I will dwell in the House of the Lord FOR EVER?" He knew—he could not fail to know—he had, perhaps, already declared, and most certainly, after no long interval had elapsed, he *did* declare, as we read in this very Book of Psalms, that God "had made his days but as a span long," and that "every man even at his best estate was altogether vanity."[c] He pro-

[a] Psalm lxxxiv. 1, 2; and xliii. 3.
[b] 2 Cor. iv. 1. [c] Psalm xxxix. 5.

fessed that he accounted himself to be but "a stranger and a sojourner before God, as all his Fathers were;" and he prayed to be spared a little, that he "might recover his strength, before he should go hence and be no more seen."[d] He must, therefore, have looked beyond the tabernacle where God was visibly adored, and which He deigned to inhabit among men: nay, he must have looked beyond the splendid and stately edifice which he knew, by prophetic revelation, his son Solomon should erect, and which should be the peculiar glory of Israel, and the astonishment of all the earth. He must have been under the influence of the very same feelings and expectations, which animated him when he said, unconscious (it may be) to Whom his words bare witness, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor wilt Thou suf-

[d] Psalm xxxix. 13.

fer Thine Holy One to see corruption." And again, "I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness."[e] True it is, that when David had served his own generation, by the will of God, "he fell asleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption."[f] True it is, that only of His greater Son according to the flesh, Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham, could it be fully said, that "God loosed Him from the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden in it; that God raised Him again, and He saw no corruption."[g] But the dissolution and disorganization of the mortal body, the decomposition of its natural elements, and even the dispersion of its component particles, does not involve, of necessity, the extinction, the

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[e] Psalm xvi. 10; and xvii. 15.

[f] Acts xiii. 36. [g] Acts ii. 29—32.

annihilation, or even the torpor and stagnation of the soul. "When the spirit of the beast goeth downward to the earth, the spirit of man," said the wise Solomon, "goeth upward to Him who gave it;" [h] while a greater than Solomon hath directly affirmed what is there necessarily implied, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him." [i] With what precision, or to what extent David realized the nature of the disembodied state we are not prepared to determine; that he *did* realize it is a fact beyond all doubt; and when he said, "I will dwell in the House of the Lord for ever," his spirit soared far beyond the towers and the tabernacles of the earthly Zion, which were but the image of the true, to that of which it was the appointed type and symbol, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusa-

[h] Eccles. iii. 21. [i] Luke xx. 38.

lem, "the city that hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God."[k]

Still, we are far less interested in determining the amount of David's knowledge, or in estimating the accuracy of David's perceptions, than in weighing and applying those exceeding great and precious promises which it is our own privilege to possess; those fuller and clearer developements of life and immortality, which "Kings and Prophets of old desired to see, and yet saw not." The way into the holiest of all, "said St. Paul," is now manifested: "Christ hath consecrated a way for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh," by which all may approach unto the Father—and in which all who *do* approach shall "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; beholding the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls."[l] "Be-

[k] Heb. xi. 10.

[l] Heb. x. 20; and 1 Peter i. 9.

cause I live," was the language of the Lord Jesus to His disciples, "ye shall live also;" and beyond all doubt, *as* He lives, so shall His people live. They shall live a life of consciousness uninterrupted even by death; a life of intelligent existence to God and to themselves; —such a life as Stephen, the proto-martyr, must have expected to lead, when he supplicated with his expiring breath, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;"[m] and such a life as St. Paul must have anticipated, when he avowed his desire "to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better."[n] On this most momentous point, however, Holy Scripture hath not left us without explicit witness. There is a remarkable passage in its closing book, which not only takes up the exquisite and touching imagery of the Psalm, where David leaves it, but carries it for-

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[m] Acts vii. 59. [n] Phil. i. 23.

ward, and extends it throughout the everlasting age. It was declared, by a celestial messenger, speaking to the beloved disciple of those who had come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb, "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them; they shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."[o]

It need scarcely be noted how completely identical is this, in spirit and in substance, with the imagery of the Psalm;

[o] Rev. vii. 14, 15, 16, 17.

how it connects the "living waters" of grace, beside which, in the Psalm, the Shepherd is said "to lead His flock," with the living waters of glory, where the sheep will no longer need the Shepherd's guidance, because they shall always behold and realize the fulness of His manifested Presence; the glory, within the wide circle of whose rays no evil thing can penetrate. Thus we perceive the consummation of Messiah's inestimable promise to His people: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."[p] It is thus that we deduce, from the Psalmist and from the Evangelist, the Prophet of the Law and the Prophet of the Gospel, the very same attribute of perpetuity. The ransomed of

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[p] John iv. 13, 14.

the Lord will dwell in the house of the Lord FOR EVER; FOR EVER will their praise ascend with unwearied, unabated fervour; and FOR EVER will His benefits flow forth in a copious and unexhausted stream. The remembrance of former things—former frailties or errors, sins or sorrows—if indeed they are not altogether effaced and obliterated from the tablet of memory, shall only, by the force of contrast, enhance the enjoyment of present blessings. It will be the high privilege of those who enter in; that "they shall go no more out;" of those who have "chosen the good part, that it shall not be taken from them."[q] This attribute, then, we can appreciate, if only from the contrast it presents to all that we possess beside. The fulness of celestial glories is a mystery; for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it en-

[q] Luke x. 42.

tered into man's heart to conceive what things God hath prepared for them that love Him;"[r] But we can at least apprehend their duration, if they pass beyond man's understanding in their degree. We know that, whatever they are, they are for ever. The rest is "a rest that remaineth;" the city, a "continuing city;" the kingdom, "one that cannot be moved;" the fold, a refuge and a resting place, from which they, who once enter in, shall go out no more for ever. "Beloved," said the Apostle John, "now are we the sons of God: and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."[s]

Perpetuity, however, though the benefit which we are most capable of appreciating, from the contrast which it

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[r] 2 Cor. ii. 9. [s] 1 John iii. 2.

presents to all that we prize and to which we would fondly cling below, is not the only inference which we may deduce from the language of the Psalmist: it conveys to us an intimation also in what this blessedness will consist. The Psalmist congratulates himself that the "home in which he will dwell for ever" will be the "house of the Lord." The Lord declares that "in His Father's house are many mansions,"[t] and that He will "prepare" among them "a place" for His people; the venerable writer of the Apocalypse points especial attention to the fact, that "He who sitteth upon the throne will dwell among His people;" and from all this we infer, not only that the occupation of the redeemed souls in glory will be the offering of praise to God, but the act of praising because beholding Him, and being kin-

[t] John xiv. 2.

dled by the contemplation into renewed and reiterated, unwearied and unweariable praise. We are told concerning the blessed company of heaven, the bright Intelligences which exist and adore within the circle of the light which no man can approach unto, that they "rest not day nor night," exclaiming, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty—which was, and is, and is to come."[u] Such was the strain which the Prophet Isaiah heard in vision seven hundred years before: such is still their song, and shall be for ever and ever; while that which is the employment of the heavenly hierarchy will be the employment also of the spirits of just men made perfect throughout eternity. But we do not regard these words as a mere iteration of the same unvaried and unvarying acknowledgment; we may rather

[u] Isaiah vi. 3.

conceive each separate effusion of transported and triumphant praise to be drawn forth by some fresh developement of the infinite glories and perfections of the Godhead, and to the redeemed, it may be, if not to the angels who have never fallen, by some special perception of goodness and mercy toward themselves: some unseen, unknown, unthought of interposition of the ever-watchful Godhead; intermingling itself with their course through life, and preserving them from the rock on which they might otherwise have struck, and made shipwreck of their eternal hopes, and been cast away on the shore of the land of darkness, far away from all the pleasures which they now enjoy at God's right hand for evermore. And this view derives no slight confirmation from the words of the Psalmist immediately preceding, "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Now, in his case, the pre-

sent view of goodness and mercy must often have been intercepted, or how could he have given utterance to the language of despondence, almost of despair, as when he said, "There is but a step between me and death;" and as when he asked, "Hath the Lord cast off for ever, and will He be no more entreated?" and as when he expostulated, "My soul also is sore troubled, but Thou, O Lord, how long?"[w] Precisely similar may be the case of the believer in Christ Jesus, who may be, and often is, completely ignorant of the process by which all things are working together for his good, though of the fact itself he entertains the strongest confidence. Thus it was with St. Paul himself, when he was in danger of being "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow," and when he was "pressed beyond measure, above

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[w] Psalm lxxvii. 7; cxix. 81.

strength, so that he despaired even of life."[x] But David resolved the one into his own infirmity, and Paul ascribed the other to his own imperfection. "I said it is mine own infirmity," was the acknowledgment of the Psalmist, "but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High:"[y] while St. Paul, contrasting the present condition of the believer with his expectation of the eternal state, declared, "Now we see through a glass, darkly: but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."[z] It is to be confidently expected, therefore, if not to be positively affirmed, that in the glorified state there will be a peculiar freshness and fulness of adoration in the redeemed people of God, inasmuch as His glorious perfec-

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[x] Philippians ii. 27; and 2 Cor. i. 8.

[y] Psalm lxxvii. 10. [z] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

tions, every developement of which draws forth from angelic voices fresh strains of wonder, transport, and love, are associated with special manifestations of mercy to themselves; shewing, in the retrospect of their probationary course, that "goodness and mercy" were in truth most near when they appeared to be far removed, and that the working of events, even while they drew from the afflicted Patriarch the bitter exclamation, "All these things are against me;" was really converging, as in his case, towards a signal, and complete, and final deliverance. On such a subject, however, we must not darken counsel by words without knowledge, nor attempt to penetrate within the veil one step farther than we feel ourselves to be guided by a heavenly hand. We argue thus far from the evident symbolism between the House of the Lord on earth, wherein the believer delights to meet his Lord, to the Temple, in

the heavenly Jerusalem, wherein he shall for ever dwell. The Psalmist, under a severe trial of his faith, being "grieved at the foolish when he saw the prosperity of the wicked," found the pressure of his doubts and perplexities relieved when he "went into the Temple of God;"[a] and surely we may safely argue from analogy concerning the Temple which the redeemed shall inhabit in the celestial city, that a portion of its blessedness will be found in the extension of our knowledge; when we shall learn, each for himself, that "not without cause have I done all that I *have* done in thee, saith the Lord God!"[b]

Leaving, however, that which is, in all except its principle, beyond the capacity of man; leaving the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him, as beyond the power of any human eye

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[a] Psalm lxxiii. 3, 17. [b] Ezekiel xiv. 23.

to see, or of any human ear to hear, or of any human imagination to conceive: we may dwell, in the concluding verse of the Psalm, on that feature which stood prominently forth at its commencement: on the *personal*, *individual* character of the blessed hope, the hope full of immortality —and of the glorious certainty to which it leads—"I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." I, the chief of sinners, shall abide unharmed, undaunted, unabashed, within the manifested light of the Divine Presence; I, the meanest, the frailest, the most timid, the most erring of the sheep, shall behold, face to face, my Good Shepherd. The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed me, and lead me beside the fountain of living waters—"He hath loved ME, and given Himself for ME." Such was the expectation which sustained the Patriarch Job beneath the otherwise intolerable pressure of his unparalleled calamities. "I

know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself and not another, though my reins be consumed within me."[c] Indeed we cannot be too frequently or too earnestly reminded, that the whole scheme and system of religion—that which is through life to direct the steps, and after death to save the soul—supposes a covenant between two and ONLY two parties, the soul itself, and God. Men may be the instruments of communicating grace, but they are no parties to the covenant—each sheep within the fold, however the flock may amount collectively to a "multitude which no man can number," is individually recovered, individually guided, individually pastured, and individually

[c] Job xix. 25, 26, 27.

saved. The House of God, in which we are to "dwell for ever," will extend "its walls of salvation" and expand its "gates of praise" to the full dimensions of the numbers to be admitted therein, and *would* do so, were the knowledge of the Lord to "cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea," so that from the present hour every sinner departing should be a saint received to glory. This, however, would not in any wise affect or impair the individuality of the relationship between each and the Good Shepherd—"He loved ME, and gave Himself for ME." Such, it is clear from the tenor of the entire Psalm, was David's own perception. From first to last, through every stage, and at every period, and in every variation of his course—in the recovery, the provision, the guidance, the guardianship, the restoration, the deliverance; in the banquet spread, and the guest

accepted, and the welcome repeated and multiplied, we have throughout but two parties—himself and his Lord, the sheep and the Shepherd, the sinner to be saved, and the Great Captain of Salvation who makes him more than conqueror. Such was the experience of St. Paul. No man ever prized human friendships more highly, no man ever loved friends more tenderly, yet we see the Apostle continually turn aside to Christ, as though finding in Him what he would vainly seek in all beside. Here then is a test by which we may try, here is a standard by which we may examine, here is an ordeal by which we may prove OURSELVES. We ought to realize, each for himself, as did the Psalmist and the Apostle, the perception of an individual covenant—a covenant or compact, in which we both come away from others, and look off from ourselves; and which needs not to its validity, however it may

require to its complete accomplishment, the intervention and instrumentality of man. None loved more than David the habitation of the Lord's house; none looked more reverently than David on the services and sacrifices of the Lord's ministers. Yet "He hath made with ME," saith the Psalmist, "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure."[d] And so there must be a like conviction on the part of the true believer that this covenant is also made with him—with *him*, not only as a member of the great aggregate of the church, but as being, singly and separately, the purchase of the blood of Christ, the object of the travail of His soul. There will, moreover, be evidences of its existence, proofs of its efficacy, seals of its validity, which can be apprehended by himself alone. He alone can tell, as he

[d] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

takes a retrospective view of his own path through life, how events and circumstances have been ordered to the accomplishment of God's purpose: how, it may be, his natural infirmities, his constitutional peculiarities, his special temptations, yea, even (it is possible) his besetting sins, have been constrained into subserviency to the purposes of God, so that he has been led by a way that he knew not, and by paths that he could never have imagined, unto that broad and healthy place, where at last he finds freedom for his steps, and liberty to his soul. In this sense, "he that believeth hath the witness in himself;" and this inward witness is itself the seal of Heaven affixed to the covenant of grace. And he who thus enters, whether into the secret chamber or the assembly of the faithful; expecting in the one case what God will say to him, or expressing in the other what he would say to God; may rest assured that he is

in very deed a follower of them, "who are now through faith and patience inheriting the promises"—a follower of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, who are now seated in the kingdom of God—yea, of this very David, who dwells in the house of the Lord for ever—of Paul, who "though his earthly house of this tabernacle has been dissolved, inherits a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."[e]

We ought, then, as we value peace in life, and would realize hope in death—we ought to cherish and to cultivate these perceptions of the individuality of true religion—of religion, regarded as a covenant between man and God: by which He shall be faithfully served upon earth, and our "spirits shall be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." We should accustom ourselves to retire, not only from

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[e] 2 Cor. v. 1.

the world but from the church, not only from the active pursuits and occupations of life, but even at times from Christian converse and companionship, that we may be alone with God in Christ. Thus shall we best realize the consciousness of this individual guidance through perplexities which no others would suspect; of this individual guardianship, amidst perils which no others would conceive. Much may be done in the habitation of God's house, and the place where His honour dwelleth, to feed with the oil of grace the sacred flame which the breath of the Spirit has kindled upon the altar of the heart; but it is in solitude—in that solitude which best affords scope for communion with God—that the most abundant supplies will be imparted and received. And the vitality of that religion might well be suspected, which lived upon the excitement of social exercises or public ministrations, and could appear

vigorous and active only amidst a crowd. We must die alone, and we ought, therefore, in a measure at least, to live alone, that we may prepare to die—we ought to seek in life what we hope to realize in death, "I am not alone, because the Father is with me." And let it be among the employments and exercises of our solitude, to test our own Christian course by this invaluable Psalm—to compare what we have been, and what we are, with the experience here recorded of the man after God's own heart. Here are described, with an exquisite and impressive minuteness, what must have been, what must still be, our circumstances, characters, and conditions, if we are indeed members of Christ's family, and sheep of Christ's fold. And to no other "family save that which in heaven and earth is named of Christ,"[f] and to no other flock,

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[f] Eph. iii. 15.

save those who are the objects of His care because they have been the purchase of His blood, can ANY belong, who find this Psalm, from beginning to end, as a mirror to reflect their own experience—who can describe what is past in the language of the Psalmist, "Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life;" and anticipate in the same language what is yet to come, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever!"

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